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Faculty of Arts

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# The Publishing of African literature:

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Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and  
the Heinemann African Writers Series  
1962 – 1988

A Dissertation Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree  
of

Doctor of Philosophy in Literature

By

NOURDIN BEJJIT, B.A., M.A.

Submission date: 30 September 2008  
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*To the cherished memory of parents,*

*The Publishing of African literature:  
Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and  
the Heinemann African Writers Series 1962 – 1988*

**ABSTRACT**

Since its launch in 1962, Heinemann Educational Books' African Writers Series has played a crucial role in the dissemination of African literature worldwide, and contributed to the creation of critical awareness among readers and critics of its distinct qualities and values. While the creative works of celebrated African writers such as Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o have enjoyed a wide popularity, and elicited an important amount of critical attention, the role of HEB in promoting the literary careers of a whole generation of African writers has rarely been discussed and analysed. In particular, very little has been written about either the relationship of Achebe or Ngugi with the HEB publishers or about the publishing processes of their works. This dissertation is a modest contribution to this still unexplored field of research. Drawing on the archives of AWS housed at the University of Reading and Harvard University, and on recent interviews conducted with some of the Series' major editors, this dissertation endeavours to provide firsthand information on the extraordinary circumstances which led to the creation and enduring success of the AWS series. It also provides a careful assessment of the long association which HEB had with Achebe and Ngugi, and offers elaborate accounts of the editorial processes of a number of their novels and plays.

**Keywords:**

William Heinemann, Heinemann Educational Books, African Writers Series, African literature, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, James Ngugi, Alan Hill, Keith Sambrook, James Currey, Henry Chakava, Aig Higo, manuscript, paperback, hardcover, book review, publishing, editing, Ibadan, Nairobi, London.



# Contents

Acknowledgement  
Abstract

Introduction:	1
Chapter One:   Heinemann Educational Books and the African Market	13
Chapter Two:   The African Writers Series: History, Editorship, and Markets	49
Chapter Three:  “Wherever Something Stands, Something Else Will Stand Beside It”: Chinua Achebe and Heinemann	75
Chapter Four:   The Making of James Ngugi	117
Chapter Five:   The Path to Recognition: The Rise of Ngugi wa Thiong’o	154
Conclusion:	186
Appendices	
Appendix 1:	192
Appendix 2:	207
Appendix 3:	222
Bibliography:	236

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# *Introduction*

Several years ago, as an undergraduate student, I read as part of a course syllabus an assigned short story by Ngugi wa Thiong'o titled "The Village Priest". The short story provoked my curiosity and enthusiasm for further reading and I devoted the summer holidays to reading some African works, the first of which were Ngugi's *The River Between* and Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*. The outcome of this early encounter with African literature is that the small number of volumes I acquired had a similar cover, colour, and spine, and I could easily identify what I soon came to think of as 'African books' in the local bookshop. They were published by Heinemann Educational Books and were part of a list called African Writers Series (henceforth AWS). Shelving these little 'pocket' books was a source of immense pleasure.

With hindsight, perhaps my initial discovery of African literature through the AWS was largely what determined my decision to take a postgraduate degree in 'National and International Literatures in English' some years later. In 2004 when the Open University's then Literature (now English) Department announced a research studentship in its AHRC funded project on Colonial and Postcolonial History of the Book, with the purpose of investigating "material conditions affecting publishing in the colonial and post-colonial world," I could not be more pleased. This was a research programme that I felt offered me an opportunity to investigate the origins of a literature that for long years caught my imagination. The small collection of AWS in my bookcase stimulated the thought to write a proposal on Heinemann's famous series which received the approval of the examining committee. The outcome of that early endeavour is the present dissertation.

From the start the aim of this thesis has been to uncover the history of the AWS and bring to light the conditions that led to its success. Whereas many of the 359 books that constitute the bulk of the series have generally received their share of critical attention,

very little has been written about the global history of the series or the complicated narrative of how each volume of this substantial collection of African texts came into existence. While most critics have remained engrossed in their favourable textual and thematic readings of this large body of African literature, others who have gone a long way to write biographies of some prominent African writers like Achebe, or to assemble and edit source books on the lives and works of authors like Ngugi have surprisingly missed or dismissed these writers' publishing records.

The subject has not been much better served by existing works in book and publishing history, which supply at best a rather uneven account of the series. Even in the highly informative house history by John St. John, *William Heinemann: A Century of Publishing 1890-1990*, a conspicuous absence of a thorough discussion of the series invites some questioning. There are precisely two and half pages that refer to the AWS only in broad terms and hardly examine its genesis or development. Although one might contend that the book was intended as a history of the hardback publisher, it must be recalled that several works by African writers such as Achebe and Ngugi were initially published in hardcover format by William Heinemann before these works appeared in the AWS as paperbacks. Did not their association with William Heinemann, for instance, merit a chapter in a book that exceeds 600 pages?

Aside from St. John's voluminous book, a number of critical studies have discussed the connections between the AWS as an institution and African literature. One general aspect that defines these studies is that they eventually put forward some controversial and unverified conclusions lacking in any archival information to back their hypothetical arguments. Gareth Griffiths's *African Literatures in English: East and West*, for example, offers a survey of Anglophone literature from Africa south of the Sahara and north of Zambia, from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries. In Griffiths own words, the



book is an “attempt at initiating a sociology of the text written in English in Africa as a *literary history in the traditional sense*.”<sup>1</sup>

The core argument of Griffiths is that any study of African literatures in English should deal with the context of what he calls “patronage systems”, a term which he uses to refer to the economic, political, and cultural forces that have not only allowed the possibility of literary expression, but also set its limits. These systems of patronage, we are told, vary from a period to another. There is, for instance, the slavery system whereby African slaves had to struggle “against the institutions and patronages”, and “against the denigratory self-constructions of their condition as black Africans.”<sup>2</sup> The missionary presses which introduced printing and publishing services into mission settlements in Africa and served as ‘modernising’ and ‘civilizing’ tools also exercised their own mode of patronage. Where they gave African converts the means to present their views, they simultaneously suppressed any material deemed inappropriate or subversive.<sup>3</sup> From the case of the missionary-controlled presses Griffiths moves to discuss what he terms “the secular patronage of publishing houses” which involves an amalgam of factors -- forces external to Africa, the internal prerequisites of nation-building, and post-independence publishing constraints. Griffiths’ inevitable inclusion of the AWS as a patronage force, as far as this dissertation goes, is an entirely unsubstantiated claim.

Concerned with the modalities of cultural power, its mechanism of functioning as well as reproducing, Griffiths’ book interprets the role of HEB in shaping the styles of African narratives as a form of control. He argues that in opening up opportunities for literary expression, the Series simultaneously limited such expression by emphasising particular types of works. Realist novels dealing with cultural tensions between modernity and tradition

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<sup>1</sup> Gareth Griffiths, *African Literatures in English: East and West* (Essex: Pearson Education Ltd., 2000), p.2. (Italics added).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.23. (Italics added).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.61.



and later criticism of post-independence corruption were largely favoured over other modes of writing. As such, the new works published in the Series were likely to reflect the Achebe model.<sup>4</sup> The AWS' aim, he adds, "was not so much to publish existing contemporary African English writing, as to create it."<sup>5</sup> He even asserts that Achebe "simply selected the texts he believed had the most literary value [and which] reflected his own tastes, and his own position in the various debates about African writing in the period."<sup>6</sup>

Griffiths seems to attribute to Achebe and the editors of the Series a role that was far beyond their actual functions. It suffices to consult the list of books published in the series during its first decade, when Achebe was directly involved as an editor, to note different facts. Most books of this period were, in fact, either reprints of books that had already been published by other publishers British or otherwise, or translations into English, many of which preceded the publication of Achebe's first novel or his involvement with HEB as editor. What is more, these books came to the Series through various other individuals whose influence on the trajectory of the series was equal to that of Achebe. Can one really accept that Ferdinand Oyono, Mongo Beti, Sembene Ousmane, or Peter Abrahams followed the thematic subjects treated in Achebe's novels, or argue that "by the mid-1960s, an unofficial 'template' existed which guided potential young African writers towards certain themes and stylistic choices rather than others"? Did Ayi Kwei Armah's style, for instance, abide by any existing 'template'? Armah's bitter exchange with Achebe about the latter's unfavourable opinions was documented and Achebe himself openly wrote and spoke about his dislike of Armah's novel as a 'sick book' that 'failed to convince' him.<sup>7</sup> Did the autobiographical writings of politicians like Kaunda, Nkrumah or Odinga represent personal tastes of Achebe? Faced with

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.79.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.84.

<sup>7</sup> Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day: Essays* (New York: Anchor Press, Doubleday, 1975), pp. 19-29. See also Bernth Lindfors, ed., *Conversations with Chinua Achebe* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), pp.134-5.

Griffiths's statements, Keith Sambrook's answer was "you can only publish what other people have written, only what's available."<sup>8</sup>

In addition, there is nothing in the records that backs these claims. Achebe was not active as an editor or advisor to the series during the period of the Nigerian civil war. His publishers were not able to contact him regarding his own books let alone consult him about the publishing of books by other writers. His opinions made on rare occasions on Armah's *The Beautiful Are Not Yet Born* and John Munonye's *Obi* came rather too late to influence the already taken decision of the publishers. His occasional visits to London during this period were too short to produce any vigorous impact on the shape of the series. In fact, the contribution of Achebe to AWS has been either misread or overstated. As I argue in Chapter One, his position was crucial to HEB in particular areas, notably increasing sales figures, promoting the public image of the infant Series in Africa, and helping marketing the AWS in the West as an 'authentic' literary series. Despite this broad divergence in perspective, Griffiths study is a notable contribution to the sociological study of Anglophone African literature. His analysis provides a significant framework that is essential for understanding the conditions in which African literature emerged.

Another important critique of the Series is found in Graham Huggan's, *The Postcolonial Exotic*. Huggan argues that the consumption of African literature in the West is a result of the metropolitan fascination with the 'exotic'. He presents the case of AWS to suggest that publishing institutions such as HEB, aware of the appeal of the 'exotic' among readers of the metropolis, have encouraged anthropological reading of African literature. Although conscious of the dangers of his speculative hypothesis which "would require considerable (and not always readily available) statistical support,"<sup>9</sup> Huggan ventured in six

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<sup>8</sup> Keith Sambrook, Interview by Author, 19 September 2005, London. See Appendix 2, p. 239.

<sup>9</sup> Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London & New York: Routledge, 2001), p.50.



dense pages to interrogate the strategies through which HEB marketed African literature to 'prove' his point.

Relying on some questionable findings of his former PhD student at Harvard University, Camille Lizarribar, Huggan is led to make some inaccurate and untenable statements. One of these quotes from Lizarribar's thesis shows how lack of accurate information leads to misreading the condition of publishing African literature:

African authors will often turn to foreign publishers because of a high mistrust in local publishing, and to be assured of a higher quality product. *Therefore*, both writers and books are geared *primarily* towards an outside audience.<sup>10</sup>

The difficulty with this quote is that while the first sentence contains some elements of truth, the conclusion is entirely inaccurate. That African writers strived to have their works published by established foreign firms did not necessarily imply that their readership was made of foreign audience. The facts on the ground indicate that during the first three decades of AWS' existence 80% of its books were sold in Africa while 10% were sold in Britain and Europe and the remaining 10% in North America.<sup>11</sup>

Although there were signs indicating the rise of the series' sales in Europe and the United States from the mid 1980s onwards as HEB editors struggled to gain a foothold in these highly competitive markets, Africa was still predominantly the main targeted market. What these statistics suggest is that AWS evolved not so much as a platform for elitist and bizarre literary production as a natural reaction to the plain demands of the book market. In Africa, AWS catered mostly for an ever increasing student readership as many of the series

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<sup>10</sup> Lizarribar, C.B., "Something Else Will Stand Beside It: The African Writers Series and the Development of African Literature" (Ph.D diss., Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1998). p. 58; quoted in Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, p.51. (Italics added).

<sup>11</sup> James Currey, Interview by Author, 23 August 2005, Oxford. See Appendix 1, p. 217. See Also James Currey, *Africa Writes Back*, p.31 (manuscript).

publications were scheduled for literature courses at newly established colleges and universities. Nevertheless, the fundamental problem with Huggan's theory of the 'exotic' is that it posits a conclusion that rests on no concrete evidence. Did readers in the metropolis buy the Series' titles because they were fascinated with their inherent 'exotic' quality whatever this implies? Until we have produced a documented account of the history of reception of African literature in the West, this question is likely to remain without answer.

Consider now Huggan's evidence. Following Lizarribar he evokes the Series' packaging, as an aspect of HEB 'exoticist' marketing strategy. Thus for him the Series' covers not only conformed "to Euro-American preconceptions of 'simplicity', 'primitivism' and 'authenticity'," but these preconceptions, he goes to explain,

...also hover round the edges of the *early* titles' covers, several of which feature emblematic images and designs and, in black and white on the back cover, a crudely amateurish photograph of the author for what appears to be ethnic identification purposes. These covers arguably betray a preoccupation with the iconic representation of an 'authentic Africa' for a *largely foreign* readership...<sup>12</sup>

Unlike Huggan's – and before him Lizarribar's – bold assertion, the early readership of the Series was predominantly African. Even more the covers themselves were often produced by Africans. The "emblematic images and designs", in fact, were drawn by African artists just as the authors' photographs were chosen by the authors themselves and sent to HEB's editors whenever they were asked to supply them. Even the blurbs were often written – or amended in the later proof stage – by the authors themselves. It might be argued that these African artists and writers supported the circulation of their works as 'exotic' and 'primitive' artefacts. But in the absence of archival documentation this statement can only be dealt as a free-floating hypothesis.

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<sup>12</sup> Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, p.53. (Italics added).

A good part of Lizarribar's discussion of the Series deals with the figure of Hill, whose autobiography she uses to "establish and explore both the contexts and contents of the Series."<sup>13</sup> First, she argues that the series is linked to Hill's missionary feelings which affected "his vision of the creation of the African Writers Series."<sup>14</sup> "As a modern missionary," she explains, "Hill would not merely bring light into the dark continent; instead, he would provide a light that would allow the dark continent to reveal its own mysteries through the mediation of literature and good business sense."<sup>15</sup> Regardless of the prejudice underlying her expression, much of Lizarribar's interpretation of Hill's role in the creation of the Series is based on reading his autobiography as a travelogue. Such a reading tends to focus on various rhetorical tropes that Hill produces while recounting his movement as a European traveller in the then unfamiliar Africa. The Dark Continent imagery which occasionally occurs in the book is evoked to emphasize a powerful analogy between Hill's role as a publisher and that of his grandfather, a nineteenth-century missionary who had built a school in the Cameroon. In highlighting this analogy Lizarribar's appears to re-enact the old discredited imperial discourse about the civilizing mission of the West. Although Lizarribar draws on some HEB's archives, Hill's autobiography remains her principal source of information and citation. Reading her dissertation one comes across several inaccuracies of information such as her assertion that "[i]n 1946 Alan Hill became the director of Heinemann Educational Books"<sup>16</sup> or that "[t]he original impulse for the series came about in the late 50's during the initial period of HEB's overseas expansion."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Lizarribar, p.2.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.83.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.83-4.

<sup>16</sup> Lizarribar, p.72. HEB itself was created in 1961.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.80.



In pointing out these inaccuracies the aim is to highlight the importance of archival research for any theoretical discussion of the evolution of African literary production. More specifically the study of HEB's archive not only serves to understand the conditions which enabled the emergence of particular themes, texts, and genres in African literature, but also provides documented information on the types of response which particular texts elicited among various readers at different times and in different places.

This dissertation does not claim to cover the entire body of AWS series, nor does it pretend to be a critical study of its publishing history. These are far too ambitious undertakings to accommodate in this dissertation, and require concerted efforts to access and study the massive HEB archives preserved in various libraries in Britain and abroad. The main focus of this study, it has to be admitted, was determined by a major constraint. While extensive use has been made of the Series' archive located at the University of Reading, these primary materials constitute only a moderate portion of the larger HEB records scattered across the five continents. In particular, the records of HEB's former branches in both Nairobi and Ibadan should offer rich and complementary information on the publishing history of AWS. Their immediate inaccessibility has perforce limited both scope and interest of this dissertation.

The archive at University of Reading contains mostly correspondence between African writers, editors, agents and printers on the subjects of contracts, royalties, printing process, sales and translation rights of many AWS' titles. The absence of various readers' reports, statistical data on sales either of the original publications or the subsequent reprints and editions of the Series titles, and the scarcity of documents revealing the way in which the AWS emerged and the way its editors and other key players contributed to the rise and development of the Series, among others, are some of the major lacunae that this project has to face. The case of accessing the publishing records of the best ever selling author in the series, Achebe, illustrates this problem even more clearly. His catalogued publishing files are housed in three major libraries. The first of these is Houghton Library at Harvard

University which holds an impressive collection of Achebe's publishing records. The collection consists of original and drafts of manuscripts of his works from *Arrow of God* (1964) to *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987), and of a small amount of correspondence with his publishers. Second, the Library of the University of Reading also contains an important collection of Achebe's files which related to the publishing process of both *Girls at War* and *Beware Soul Brother* in the AWS. Other files within this collection involve the translations of some of his works, particularly the earlier novels, into African languages such as Swahili and Yoruba. The third archive is located at the Random House Library, which holds the publishing archives of William Heinemann. Since William Heinemann was the original publisher of Achebe, most of the publishing records of his five novels, particularly his first four novels are now in the safe keep of The Random House Library. Accessing Achebe's record in this particular library required a permission letter from Achebe, a condition which alas proved almost impossible despite persistent efforts to procure the said authorization.

In spite of these challenges, full and intelligent use has been made of the primary sources available with the aim of producing an informative account of the Series. Drawing on the archives of AWS housed at Reading and Harvard universities, and on recent interviews conducted with some of the Series' major editors, this dissertation endeavours to provide firsthand information on the extraordinary circumstances which led to the creation and enduring success of the AWS. It also provides a careful assessment of the long association which HEB had with Achebe and Ngugi, and offers elaborate accounts of the editorial processes of a number of their novels and plays.

Chapter One deals with the connection between British publishing and African literature. It sets the context for the birth of the AWS and describes the emergence of an 'African literature' in English. In addition, this chapter focuses on Hill as the architect and head of HEB and discusses the publishing policies he adopted and followed in the post-war period to build HEB into a major international publisher. The open, wholehearted

encouragement of African writings in the 1960s and 1970s suggests a radical shift in the attitudes of British publishers. This shift arguably occurred at a time when the entire publishing industry in England witnessed profound readjustment following the war years. Yet more importantly, the full-scale 'decolonization' process in Africa as in the rest of the empire forced British publishers to adopt new strategies to keep their businesses going in Africa as well as respond to the growing educational needs of African governments and peoples. The project of the AWS came as part of HEB's belated interest in securing a share in the African market which hitherto had been dominated by Oxford University Press, Longmans, Nelson and others like Macmillan and Evans. Chapter Two pursues the discussion of the outstanding achievements of the Series and the occasional difficulties to which it was subjected and concludes with a survey of the conditions and circumstances that led to its decline and final cessation. While the first two chapters introduce the broad context in which the Series came into existence and full growth, the last chapters examine the strong impact of the AWS on the careers of two major African authors, namely Achebe and Ngugi. Through a careful reading of the correspondence of HEB editors with these authors, each of these chapters traces the slow and complicated publishing process of particular manuscripts, and analyses the political, literary, and commercial factors which governed this enduring and dynamic relationship between authors and publishers.

Based on Achebe's correspondence with the Heinemann publishers, Chapter Three provides an elaborate account of the multiple stages *Things Fall Apart*, *Girls at War*, *Beware Soul Brother* and *Anthills of the Savannah* took from early drafts to final manuscripts ready for publication by Heinemann. Other works have alas been omitted because records which document the processes of their publication were either inadequate or entirely unavailable. Following the same approach, Chapters Four and Five use Ngugi's publishing records to provide a detailed description of the publishing stages of some of his major works from the mid 1960s to the mid 1980s. What the accessible records of both Achebe and Ngugi's correspondences with his publishers reveal is the crucial role these

veteran agents of the book industry played in promoting both their works and names. In describing the evolution of this remarkable partnership, these chapters also show how the views of the two writers developed vis-à-vis indigenous and foreign publishing.

The appendices contained in this dissertation are intended both as a primary source and a further elaboration of the multiple issues raised throughout the body of this study. These texts introduce rich and captivating testimonies by two key figures who influenced the history of the AWS. Their reminiscences and comments throw additional light on a number of questions which the publishing files of Achebe and Ngugi have left unanswered.



# Chapter One

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## *Heinemann Educational Books and the African Market*

But their own coming too was not a tragedy as we imagine, nor yet a blessing as they imagine.<sup>1</sup>

In Africa we didn't want little poodles of a multinational company, but proud local citizens who were strong enough to stand on their own feet [...] *I gave them* dominion status instead of the colonial subordination preferred by some of our competitors. I could foresee that these countries would not be satisfied much longer with textbooks imported from Britain. *They wanted* more of their own books, locally published and I appointed men who were capable and eager to bring this about.<sup>2</sup>

In *In Pursuit of Publishing* (1988) Hill recounts his life story and the chain of remarkable events that led to his success as a publisher and that of HEB which, under his direction, emerged as a leading publishing house in the Commonwealth. The book, in fact, is an informative memoir and an indispensable reference on the history of post-war publishing, despite its dry narrative and rather some strong opinions of its author.<sup>3</sup> Its importance lies in its profuse details about the sales figures, editorial processes of scores of manuscripts, and the complicated post-war publishing situation. Over and over again Hill recalled his readers of the crucial role he played in the development of both African literature in English and the publishing industry in Africa.

There is much to warrant the complacent rhetoric of this account, however. The man's achievements cannot, by any means, be limited to setting up a small Educational

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<sup>1</sup> Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1991), p. 60.

<sup>2</sup> Hill, quoted in John St. John, *William Heinemann: A Century of Publishing 1890-1990* (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1990), p. 477. Italics added.

<sup>3</sup> There are many examples that reveal Hill's tendency for simple and absolute judgments as to say that the 1940s were "the greatest ten years in the history of democracy since the age of Pericles" or that "the attitude of most British academics" towards Africa as late as 1963 was that expressed so notoriously in that year by Trevor Roper, who had said that "Perhaps in the future there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none: there is only the history of Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness... and darkness is not a subject of history." See Hill, *In Pursuit of Publishing* (London: John Murray, 1988), p. 233.



Department into a major international company competing with giant publishers such as Longman, Macmillan and Oxford University Press. His pioneering adventure in publishing African literature is widely acknowledged a groundbreaking event in the field of literary publishing. It is impossible to talk today about African literature without recognising the singular contribution of Hill in the shaping of the AWS, whose presence since 1962 has placed African literature on the world's literary map. Thanks to his unprecedented, but momentous decision to publish and promote obscure African writers like Achebe and Ngugi, African literature has taken on new cultural dimensions both in and outside Africa. The launching of the Series, as Achebe in a celebratory tone remembers, "was more than a daring act of faith" and reflects Hill's "shrewd gaze into the seeds of time."<sup>4</sup>

This chapter attempts to discuss Hill's publishing policies in the post-war period and his role in giving shape to a new tradition of African writing. While focusing on Hill as the architect of HEB, it also provides an historical account of the materialization of 'modern' African literature in English in the second half of the twentieth century.

## -I-

To start with, the end of the Second World War brought new challenges for the publishing industry in Britain and threatened to reverse the ephemeral success attained through the war years during which the demand for books exceeded all expectations particularly during the last three years of the war, and significantly reduced the risks of large stocks. "The blackout, a reduction in alternative forms of entertainment, the tedium of life in the armed forces meant that people were reading more, were voracious for reprints of established books, let alone the latest novel."<sup>5</sup> Despite paper shortage and a decrease in the annual number of new titles from a yearly average of 181 in the 1930s to an

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<sup>4</sup> Achebe, Foreword to Alan Hill, *In Pursuit of Publishing* (London: John Murray, 1988), p. x.

<sup>5</sup> St. John, *William Heinemann*, p. 301.

average of 55 during war time, William Heinemann's turnover and net profit continued to be 'satisfactory'<sup>6</sup>.

Table 1: Summary of Heinemann's annual turnover and Net Profit between 1934 and 1945 <sup>7</sup>

Year	Annul Turnover	Net Profit
1934	£ 177,035	£ 17,890
1935	£ 184,221	£ 17,852
1936	£ 170,464	£ 15,908
1937	£ 207,458	£ 14,486
1938	£ 179,121	£ 14,337
1939	£ 182,382	£ 10,591
1940	£ 170,247	£ 5,677
1941	£ 201,635	£ 9,880
1942	£ 227,662	£ 15,845
1943	£ 215,371	£ 11,130
1944	£ 240,420	£ 10,307
1945	£ 251,294	£ 12,934

With the end of paper rationing at the close of the 1940s, however, unhealthy aspects of the publishing trade in the form of overproduction and overstocking started to emerge. The annual number of books published in the UK had not only practically matched the pre-war record of 17,137 in 1937 but steadily increased over the subsequent years from 17,072 in 1950 to 23,783 in 1960.<sup>8</sup> The growth of competition among publishers at home and the increase in the expense of producing books, which cost three to four times more than in 1938, therefore, appeared to have a strong impact on the public's purchasing ability.<sup>9</sup> To keep the business in balance and maintain the same margin of profit, publishers were obliged to use paper of poorer quality and the payment in some cases of lower royalties.<sup>10</sup> A letter written by Frere, the Manager Director of William Heinemann, to John Masfield in November 1949 reflects the rise of prices and the imminent risks of the business then:

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> The figures are collected from Hill's, *In Pursuit of Publishing* and John St John's *William Heinemann*. See John St. John, Chapters 15, 16, 18 and Appendices B and C.

<sup>8</sup> St John, *William Heinemann*, p. 311. For more on the subject, see Thomas Kelly, *History of Public Libraries in Great Britain, 1845-1965* (London: library Association, 1973), p. 491.

<sup>9</sup> St. John, p.309.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 310.



I have tried to get out some figures which would show you how the rise of the overall cost of production of 300 per cent higher than pre-war is made up. For instance, the actual paper which we should use in two of your books under discussion now costs 275 per cent more than the same paper did in 1939. Metal, which in 1939 was £35 a ton, is now £167 a ton. The various materials used in binding are now averaged out at nearly 200 per cent above their pre-war costs. The details of the general rise in wages, selling costs, advertising rates, etc are too numerous for me to set forth in detail, but these, together with the rise in the cost of raw materials, represent the total percentage overall...<sup>11</sup>

It was amid this environment of post-War economic recession that Heinemann, like other British publishing houses, sought to promote their book industry in foreign countries. Support came from the British government who were keen on encouraging British exports in order to boost the weak economy. "Publishers who had looked abroad for markets for decades before 1939 now found themselves encouraged to revive their contacts."<sup>12</sup> The results were immediate and tangible. Only a decade later, Heinemann's branches were opened in such distant overseas countries as Australia (1948), Canada (1949), South Africa (1951), and New Zealand (1955). The establishment of these branches served, wittingly or not, to reinforce the idea of a commonwealth of nations bound together by a shared history and an ensemble of political, economic and above all cultural interests and values. Why Heinemann initially founded branches only in these white dominated countries is not clear. Was it simply a matter of sheer profit? Certainly the large rich and literate communities of readers for obvious historical reasons happened to be white. Their cultural attachment to England was more than a symbolic one. Whether in Sydney, Queensland, or Cape Town, the white population derived much of its cultural and political 'legitimacy' from a profound and complex affiliation with a supreme imperial England.

Heinemann's policy was governed by the strategic interests and policies of the British State. In fact, Heinemann was in effect enacting the British government's policy

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> John Feather, *A History of British Publishing* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 220.

towards its former colonies and its present partners in the Commonwealth union. The British Commonwealth Market Agreement secured the rights of sales and editions within the British Commonwealth and prevented American publishers from competing in the areas where Britain publishers were operating. Over and above the ample facilities and encouragement provided by the Commonwealth treaties, Britain's policy had already paved the way for such a racially inflicted approach that many British publishing companies followed suit in setting up branches abroad in white dominated areas. The Statute of Westminster 1931, which enacted the legislative equal status of the self-governing dominions of Canada, New Zealand, the Irish Free State, the Commonwealth of Australia, and the Union of South Africa, can be considered a straightforward example of the racially inflicted attitude that possessed British politics for so long. Heinemann's single branch in Africa, which happened to be in South Africa, was established for the purpose of representation rather than production. The idea of publishing African authors seemed to be ignored on the assumption that African authorship fell short of the existing 'standards' and hence no market for African books could be established. At all events, Heinemann showed little interest in African writing. As Hill puts it:

[...] the big British Publishers regarded [...] Africa only as a place where you sold books, not where you published them: and these books were overwhelmingly school books. Moreover, they were almost all written by British authors, and produced in Britain. The idea that you could publish books by African authors, and especially by creative writers, had not yet occurred to these great houses, whose only concern was to make money out of the expanding school market. They were taking their profits out of [...] Africa, and putting nothing back in the way of investment in local publishing and encouragement of local authors.<sup>13</sup>

Hill's view of the situation, arguably, does not exclude Heinemann. However, the claim that 'these great houses' never thought of publishing African authors appears to be simplistic and raises more questions regarding the British publishers' position vis-à-vis African authorship and writing. My point is that the establishment of branches in the above

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<sup>13</sup> Hill, p.123.



mentioned *white* dominated countries reveals the low esteem, not to say disregard, which these publishing institutions showed towards African literature and authorship. As Hill shows in his autobiography, some of Heinemann managers’ “racist attitudes ...were an embarrassment to HEB – whose business was increasingly with the black sector.”<sup>14</sup>

Already by the late 1950s, Hill’s discomfort was growing because a chasm occurred between his working policies as a manager of the Educational Department from those of William Heinemann under whose authority Hill felt constrained. Being a nonconformist, Hill wanted much more freedom to decide about the destiny of the educational publishing business which was intertwined with William Heinemann’s. The sales figures show that Heinemann was heading toward bankruptcy as the profits dropped from £122,000 in 1952 to £13,000 in 1959 which meant that the pre-tax profit’s percentage fell from 19.2 in 1952 to 2 in 1961.<sup>15</sup>

Table 2 A Comparison of the sales of William Heinemann and its Educational Department.<sup>16</sup>

Year	W.H Sales	Educational Dept’s sales	Total Sales	Total Profit
1950	£443,000	£37,000	£480,000	£115,000
1953	£536,000	£62,045	£598,045	£89,000
1955	£589,000	£124,000	£713,000	£92,000
1956	£632,000	£141,182	£773,182	£93,000
1959	£573,000	£266,494	£839,494	£13,000
1960	£746,000	£352,000	£1098,000	£66,000

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.200.

<sup>15</sup> See St John, pp.415-421, where he shows that “British Book Services (Canada) Ltd, for example, started to incur losses in 1955 and William Heinemann’s accounts for that year recorded a subvention of £19,712. In 1959 Peter Davies Ltd went into the red and losses increased, reaching a trough of £30,802 in 1961. Rupert-Hart Davis Ltd in 1960 recorded a deficit of £14,707 and by 1961 its losses had increased to £20,955.” See also Hill, p. 146. He explains “Educational sales rose from £141,000 to £352,000 during the four year period (1956-1960) representing one third of the total turnover of William Heinemann Ltd. And our departmental profit of £100,000 was 28 per cent of our turnover – a far higher percentage than was being achieved by the fiction side, due to our large and profitable backlist and our small staff. Between 1949 (the end of paper rationing) and 1960, our department had published 578 books, of which 373 were educational textbooks and 205 were academic books, serious general books and plays. Of these 578 books, no fewer than 553 were still in print and selling in 1960.”

<sup>16</sup> See St John, “Book III”, Appendix B. See Also Hill’s, pp.146-173.



The failure to adapt to the paperback revolution, the decline in sales of hard-cover fiction, which was the backbone of Heinemann's business, and the deterioration of much of the Windmill Press' machinery were major elements that contributed to the situation. This was also aggravated by Heinemann's unsound policy of buying up small companies such as Secker and Warburg and Rupert Hart-Davis whose financial position was far more disastrous.<sup>17</sup> It was only when Tilling bought up the rest of the Heinemann's equity in 1961 and brought the company into the Thomas Tilling Group that the problems were finally solved as a radical reconstruction took place. Once the Tilling take-over had been complete, it was decided to set up the Educational Department into a separate company. Heinemann Educational Books thus came into being on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 1961.<sup>18</sup>

## -II-

The birth of HEB occurred during a period of rapid transformations in the educational field in Britain. The increase in population from 46 million in 1941 to 54.5 million in 1966 involved corresponding growth in pupil rates from six million in 1939 to nine million pupils in 1961. The school population was further enhanced by raising the school leaving age to 16. At the higher education level, the student's population rose from 69,000 in 1939 to 216,000 in 1962. The recommendations of the Robbins Report of 1963 resulted in the doubling of the number of students in higher education, which reached 440,000 in 1969 and necessitated the establishment of some twenty new universities. Such a steady expansion obviously had a strong impact on Heinemann's Educational Department (and later HEB), whose turnover, doubled every three or four years and reached £420,000 by 1961.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See Hill, p.160, where he sarcastically wrote: "The whole operation was known in the press as 'the Heinemann umbrella'. The idea was that we were bringing these companies in out of the wet. The truth we were in the wet ourselves and these extra burdens on our finances increased the flow to a deluge."

<sup>18</sup> St John, p. 547.

<sup>19</sup> Hill, p.72. See also St John, pp. 547-8.

These developments were by no means restricted to Britain. Its overseas colonies were also affected by the social and economic ravages of the Second World War. As British colonial authority was waning, a number of education commissions and advisory committees were appointed by the government to survey, advise and report on ways of developing educational systems in Africa. The prediction, obviously, was that once African countries became independent, the indigenisation of public services would generate an increasing demand for trained management and manpower.<sup>20</sup> To meet these future demands, school systems had to expand rapidly to help smooth the transfer of power to 'indigenous' governments and meet the contractual obligations which the inevitable increase in the population would impose. In Kenya, for example, the population rose from 5,405,966 in 1948 to 8,636,263 in 1962. This growth was in also coupled with student enrolment as the following table shows:

Table 3: The rise of school enrolment and school numbers in Kenya between 1958 and 1967.<sup>21</sup>

Year	Primary Pupils	Primary Schools	Secondary Pupils	Secondary Schools	Teacher Training Pupils
1958	651,758	4,691	15,356	81	3,545
1961	870,448	5,725	22,167	105	-----
1964	1,014,719	5,150	35,921	222	4,849
1967	1,133,179	5,959	77,681	453	5,904

In Nigeria, the total primary school population reached 1,002,559 by 1951 and the number of primary schools was recorded as 9,108. There were at the same time 93 secondary schools with a student population of 31,425. There were also 39,573 teachers working in all types of schools throughout the country. In the western region, for example, primary

<sup>20</sup> Y. G-M. Lulat, *A History of Higher Education from Antiquity to the Present: A Critical Synthesis* (Westport and London: Praeger, 2005), p.228.

<sup>21</sup> These statistics are collected from a number of sources and checked against each other. See O.W. Furley and T.Watson, *A History of Education in East Africa* (New York and London, 1978); Sorbea N. Bogonko, *Reflections on Education* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1992); Seppo Sivonen, *White-collar or hoe handle: African education under British colonial policy, 1920-1945* (Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura, 1995); and John Hanson and D.J.S Crozier, *Report on the Supply of Secondary Level Teachers in English-Speaking Africa* (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1974).



school population rose from 240,000 in 1947 to 982,755 in 1957. In the northern region, the number rose from 66,000 in 1947 to 205,767 in 1957, and secondary school enrolment increased from 9,908 in 1947 to 55,235 in 1960, while in the eastern region, the number was even more dramatic as it rose from 320,000 in 1947 to 1,209,167 in 1957.<sup>22</sup>

It should be stressed that the expansion of education in Africa and the definition of its objectives were set against the backdrop events of international politics of the post-war era. The rise of nationalism in Asia, political activism of the Afro-Americans, and indications of emerging nationalism in Africa (the Mau Mau revolt in Kenya is a case in point) were some of the driving forces behind the establishment of commissions and advisory committees on education in Africa. A direct reference was even made by the Africa Official Committee to the advance of communism in Africa as a potentially menacing factor in international politics, and the Committee urged the colonial rule to identify its educational policy more clearly than before in a way which suited Britain's political objectives in Africa.<sup>23</sup> The establishment of a number of colleges and universities across Anglophone Africa, thus, was not only perceived in terms of the demands posed by the local needs of Africans but also as effective measures aimed at preparing a "carefully-calibrated" bilingual "middle class" to "serve as a politically reliable, grateful, and acculturated indigenous elite, filling the subordinate echelons of the colony's bureaucracy and larger commercial enterprise."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> The good example I have in mind is that of the Africa Official Committee's report titled 'Africa: the Next Ten Years', where it raised concerns that "Africa was the next likely area of Soviet expansion, and that Britain and the United States should decide how best to defend their interests there over the following ten years" and where it stressed that "the aim should be to stay long enough to build up an adequately educated middle class able to administer the territory after independence." See Ritchie Ovendale, "Macmillan and the Wind of Change in Africa, 1957-1960," *The Historical Journal* 38, No. 2 (June 1995): 455-77.

<sup>24</sup> See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York and London: Verso, 1991), p.126. For an excellent survey of the history of African higher universities, see Y. G-M. Lulat, *A History of African Higher Education from Antiquity to the Present* (London and Westport: Praeger, 2005). The number of higher education institutions increased sharply after the second World War: The University college of Ghana (opened in 1948); University College of Sierra Leone (established by upgrading the existing Fourah Bay College in 1960); The University College at Ibadan (opened in 1947); Khartoum University College (created 1949); Makerere College (upgraded in 1951); the Royal Technical College at Nairobi (founded in 1951); and



The expansion of European model of education in Africa, therefore, can be interpreted in three ways. First, educational growth reflected the belief of leaders of the newly independent African countries that rapid educational development fostered economic development. Accordingly, education was often held as a key investment to incorporate in the strategies of economic development. Such an opinion rested on an assumption that that Western-style education ensured, to use Benedict Anderson's term, a 'bureaucratic future'<sup>25</sup> for the recipients of this education.

Second, enthusiasm for educational development which, in any case, meant adopting a Western-style education was accompanied by an increasing use of English as a medium of instruction and a simultaneous dependency on British publishers. Although the use of English in Africa has been debated for so long, it is necessary here to point out two factors: first because of its nature as an imposed means of communication and instruction, English has acquired the status of 'power' among African languages. African people learned too well that gaining a good working knowledge of English would facilitate their access to the job market and guarantee the speakers a degree of social respectability. Africans who commanded a good knowledge of English had the advantage to take up key positions in the social and political institutions when independence from Britain was obtained. The second factor is the adoption of English for its pragmatic usage. In the absence of a single dominant language in Africa, English offered a favourable and practical choice that none of the many 'indigenous' languages could provide. The perception among African politicians and education professionals conveyed that English was a 'neutral' language and could not harm the status-quo in the same way or extent that preference of one particular African language was sure to engender. Beside these political apprehensions, it was not lost on these strategists how important English was becoming as the international language

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the University college of Salisbury (established in 1953, but upgraded two years later to become the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland).

<sup>25</sup> Benedict Anderson, p.127.

of commerce, communication, and technological knowledge.<sup>26</sup> The emergence of a growing literate community in English, therefore, induced British Publishers, like HEB, to supply and compete even over securing textbook recommendations by the ministries of education in Anglophone Africa. In short, English seemed to be the driving force of the British publishers' enterprise in Africa.

The third interpretation of the expansion of Western-style education involves assessment of the role education in the rise of African nationalism. Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* offers a better understanding of how education played a key role in the formation and rise of African national consciousness. Anderson explains that nations, other than the product of language, race or religion, are imagined through an institutional form he calls 'print-capitalism'. Given the fact that English as a 'print-language' "created unified fields of exchange and communication", Africans – even within a single country – "became capable of comprehending one via print and paper."<sup>27</sup> 'Print-capitalism' also placed English in such a position of power that it was adopted as a national language in many African countries. It is easy, therefore, by analogy, to see how education, through English as a medium of instruction, furnished the ground for the construction of 'imagined communities' within Africa. "Nothing nurtured this bonding more than schools", which, as Anderson puts it,

formed a colossal, highly rationalised, tightly centralised hierarchy, structurally analogous to the state bureaucracy itself. Uniform textbooks, standardised diplomas and teaching certificates, a strictly regulated gradation of age-groups, classes and instructional materials, in themselves created a self-contained, coherent universe of experience.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See Joseph Schmied, *English in Africa: an Introduction* (London and New York: Longman, 1991), pp. 99-118.

<sup>27</sup> Benedict Anderson, p. 121.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.



While these statements were made in the context of South East Asia, African experience is not static, but evolving, discursive and intricately linked with other experiences, such as being colonised, bilingual, and above all 'black'. This plurality of experiences shaped African nationalism and made it distinct from other nationalisms. The school children who had been trained to "mediate between the metropolitan nation and the colonised people" to produce the "subordinate cadres for state and corporate bureaucracies" found themselves in a situation forming 'bilingual intelligentsias'. These intelligentsias had access, "inside the classroom and outside, to models of national, nation-ness, and nationalism distilled from turbulent, chaotic experiences of more than a century of American and European history".<sup>29</sup> It was English education, in this sense, that opened the gates for the intelligentsia to play a leading role in the movement of anti-colonial protest. Whether its demands, at the beginning, were for equality or afterwards for self-rule and independence, the intelligentsia carried its demands through a language and a discourse that was familiar to their British coloniser. By voicing these demands, the intelligentsia perceived itself as the lawful heir to colonial rule, a right which had been identified and justified by virtue of its European education.

### **-III-**

Given the symbiotic relationship between the spread of a European-style education in the colonies in the aftermath of the Second World War and the rise of African national consciousness, it is not strange that Heinemann's fast-growing Educational Department under the direction of Hill had a last word about the possibility of publishing Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. The point which I want to emphasise here is that since British publishing had been the invisible link in this reciprocal affinity between colonial education and African nationalism, it had perforce to continue playing the role it was assigned by the

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.140.



mere economic, political and cultural forces of the post-war era, and to take into account publishing African writing, which was emerging as a product of both colonial education and African nationalism. In other words, for British publishing to sustain its African market, it had to accept the idea of publishing creative writing by Africans because the cycle of reciprocity had now been extended. As an intellectual force both manifesting and influencing the growth of national consciousness, African literature came to be seen as an expression of idealised national values and, thus, part of a national project.

Ignoring the possibility of publishing African writings, therefore, appeared detrimental to the British publishing industry which had now become largely dependent on its growing markets in the Commonwealth. In reaching out to native writers, readers and students, British publishers also opened up to such cultures and traditions so long held in low esteem. On the other hand, African writers and education professionals were increasingly reliant on British publishers to cater for the needs of a growing literate population. Thus British publishers become an important channel that mediated the flow of 'knowledge' between the 'centre' and the 'periphery'. It seems that every part of this cycle was dependent on the existence of the other. The publication of *Things Fall Apart* by William Heinemann is not a mere coincidence as Hill describes it. Rather, it shows that in their endeavour to take part in a national movement, African writers had no other choice but to rely on a British publisher and pursue him even to London.

The story of how *Things Fall Apart* got to Heinemann's hands is well known. The manuscript had reached James Michie at Heinemann through the intervention of Gilbert Phelps, one of Achebe's BBC instructors in London. The initial reaction at Heinemann was uncertain:

Heinemann's normal fiction reader read it and did a long report, but the firm was still hesitating whether to accept it. Would anyone possibly buy a novel by an African? There were no precedents. So the rather doubting bunch at the top of Heinemann's thought of the educational department, who after all sold books to Africa and were supposed to

know about Africans. So they showed it to one of our educational advisors, Professor Donald MacRae, who was just back from West Africa. He read it in his office and ended the debate with an eleven-word report: 'This is the best first novel I have read since the war'.<sup>30</sup>

The fact that the final decision about publishing a 'novel by an African' rested with the educational department corroborates the point made earlier that publishing African literature in the 1950s and 1960s was intertwined with educational publishing, since the relationship between the two dictated a cyclic reciprocity. Bearing in mind that it was William Heinemann's chief responsibility at this time to publish fiction, their lack of enthusiasm for Achebe's novel adheres to a biased 'racial' attitude that prevailed in the company's business. Their sceptical view as to who might read Achebe's novel reveals how they had in mind essentially white readers in Britain and in such Commonwealth countries where Heinemann had established local branches.

The moment of coming to a decision over publishing Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* was important and deserves to be told. Heinemann's reader reported that "[t]his is a very exciting discovery: a well-written novel about the break-up of tribal life in one part of Nigeria". She ended by a set of positive adjectives: "Likeable, exciting, new, strongly recommended."<sup>31</sup> This encouraging report was not enough to convince "the doubting bunch at the top," perhaps because publishing an African writer was a delicate affair. Culturally, the option of publishing a 'black' African writer by a metropolitan publisher could implicitly denote *recognition* of the equality of Africans who were up to a recent time represented as 'inferior' and 'primitive', particularly a novelist who contests the colonial narrative of Africans and questions the superiority of the British. Writing for many Europeans, as Henry Louis Gates notes, "stood alone among the fine arts as the most salient repository of 'genius', the visible sign of reason itself" and that for most of them writing was seen "as the principal measure of the Africans' humanity, their capacity for

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<sup>30</sup> Kirsten Holst Peterson and A. Rutherford eds., *Chinua Achebe: A Celebration* (Oxford & Sydney: Heinemann E.B. & Dangeroo Press, 1991), p. 110.

<sup>31</sup> Moira Lynd, Report on Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Quoted in John St John, p. 518.



progress, their very place in the great chain of being.”<sup>32</sup> Politically, publishing a ‘black’ African writer meant giving voice to the colonised African writer to be heard and at the same time it meant shaping the consciousness of colonised Africans, partially through implicit questioning and contesting of the colonial ideology.

While these may be plausible reasons for William Heinemann’s reluctance to publish Achebe’s novel, there were other factors far more crucial and immediate. From a commercial point of view, it is difficult to predict the amount of income a new book by an unknown writer is likely to bring. Gordon Neavill explains:

This depends largely on the response of the public. The anticipated behaviour of the public is the most crucial element affecting the publisher’s decision at the stage of assessment. It is upon this that all economic considerations affecting publication hinge – not only whether to publish a manuscript, but also how many copies to print, what retail price to set, and the like.... The publisher’s assessment of the response of the anticipated audience to a general book is based on an awareness of what the public needs, a sense of what it is ready for and what it is tired of, informed guesswork, experience, and a possibly irrational degree of optimism. It is ultimately the publisher’s conception of the audience – accurate or inaccurate – that determines the fate of a manuscript offered to him.”<sup>33</sup>

This explains the limited number of copies of Achebe’s book published and the same small print-run accorded to the subsequent publication of his second novel, *No Longer at Ease* in 1960. On the other hand, the fate of his manuscript could easily have been worse. His publishers, after all, perceived themselves as “middlemen in the maintenance of a great tradition of literature created by an elite which could only be properly appreciated by those privileged groups who shared similar social and educational backgrounds.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Henry Louis Gates Jr., ed. *‘Race,’ Writing, and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 9.

<sup>33</sup> Gordon B Neavill, “Role of the Publisher in the Dissemination of Knowledge,” In Philip G Altbach and Sheila McVey, eds. *Perspectives on Publishing* (Toronto and London: Lexington Books, 1976), pp. 47-57.

<sup>34</sup> Jeremy Booth, “Rationalisation and Crisis: A Quarter Century of British Publishing,” In Philip G Altbach and Sheila McVey, eds. *Perspective on Publishing*, pp. 59-69.



It is impossible to say with any precision whether Hill and his team were able to engage seriously in publishing African literature the moment they formed themselves into a new company, Heinemann Educational Books, or when African countries gained their political independence. What can be said with certainty, however, is that the birth of HEB gave more freedom to Hill to explore the possibilities of expansion and investment overseas and to challenge the scepticism of William Heinemann and its bureaucratic management style. In fact, the enthusiasm for publishing African literature came from Hill whom both the publication of Achebe's novel and its instant success were, to his advantage, to prove useful in two ways. First, the success gave credit to his policy based on publishing books of 'high' literary, scientific and educational qualities. The incorporation of African literature in the book list of Heinemann was of additional benefit. Second, for Hill the publication of *Things Fall Apart* became an incentive to penetrate the African book market even further. In this way, the novel could be said to be an integral part of Hill's ambitious plans for expansion in Africa. Early in 1959, he embarked on a journey to Africa to explore the potentials of expanding the company's market share and learn about the needs of local customers. He was pleased to note that Heinemann's "new school books, particularly in science, were selling in large quantities in Nigeria." Obviously, he wrote in his memoir, "[s]omething was stirring in that part of the world."<sup>35</sup>

What was actually 'stirring' in the region were burgeoning nationalist movements. Already the Suez crisis marked the onset of decolonisation in Africa and paved the way for anti-colonial movements to seek and obtain independence during the 1960s. Three months after the end of the Suez aggression, Ghana became an independent state and Nigeria was well on its way to freedom. For a shrewd publisher like Hill these historic events offered an insight into the future of publishing business in these countries and the immense possibilities that remain to be explored.

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<sup>35</sup> Hill, p.122.

## -IV-

The timing of Hill's journey to Africa was opportune. The Educational Department which he was running had now been firmly established at home after its sales rose from £141,000 in 1956 to £266,494 in 1959, and amounted to a third of the total turnover of William Heinemann Ltd.<sup>36</sup> Gaining a foothold in other markets was essential for the growth of the company. The evident reason for Hill's journey, however, was the potential market that Africa represented. He recalled that "Heinemann's chairman, A.S. Frere, learning from the Garrick's club mafia that there was this fast money to be made in Nigeria, urged me [...] to go out there and get a slice of the action for Heinemann. But I demurred – until one day in 1957."<sup>37</sup> It was the arrival of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* into William Heinemann's office that induced Hill to rethink his position and consider the prospect of investing in publishing for Africa. It was after full consideration of the political and economic conditions of West Africa that Hill set out for his business trip to Africa in 1959, choosing Ghana as his first destination.

For British publishers who were operating in the region, publishing was going through a period of boom. As Julian Rea, the Longman Director of the Africa Division notes, "this was a period of rapidly rising sales, high profit margins and low operating costs, resulting from the colonial method of book supply."<sup>38</sup> Some publishers, he maintains, "responded to this creatively and immediately, while others, slower to appreciate what was happening, were happy to enjoy the immediate benefits while failing to plan for the future."<sup>39</sup> Diana Athill recalls that the "feeling in the air was that freedom would mean progress; that the market out there was certainly going to expand, however

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<sup>36</sup> See Table 1 (above), p.20.

<sup>37</sup> Hill, "Thirty Years of a new world Literature." *Bookseller* 15 January 1993.

<sup>38</sup> Julian Rea, "Aspects of African publishing, 1945-74," in *African Studies Since 1945: a Tribute to Basil Davidson*, ed. Christopher Fyfe (London: Longman, 1976), pp. 96-105.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*



slowly, so that it would not only be interesting to get in on the ground floor of publishing for and about Africa: it would also prove, in the long run, to be good business.”<sup>40</sup>

According to Hill the book trade in West Africa “had been for many years dominated by the two publishing houses of Oxford University Press and Longman, with a few other publishers – particularly Nelson, Evans and Macmillan – claiming a share.”<sup>41</sup> OUP, the most enterprising of these publishers during the colonial period, had opened a new office in Ibadan as early as 1949 headed by a retired Nigerian education officer, T.T. Solaru. By the time Hill visited Nigeria, the OUP had started the first publishers’ warehouse at Apapa, being confident of the good prospect of its business in West Africa. The OUP’s step came as a reaction to the visible demands of textbooks which, according to Solaru, required regular reprints, which “only emphasised the need for local publishing.” The enormous demand for books in this distant region was matched only by the growing number of manuscripts submitted for publication to Oxford editors. The OUP’s response to this was to give the Nigerian branch in 1963 “the green light to publish locally under its own imprint.”<sup>42</sup>

Longmans also made its presence felt in West Africa in the mid 1950s. Although the company started with a single sales representative in Ibadan, it soon set up a locally registered company. Longman Nigeria Limited was incorporated (into what ?) in 1961 and within a couple of years, it became one of the largest publishers in the country, acting both as a publisher producing, distributing, and marketing its own titles as well as a distribution agent for other publishers, including Heinemann. Others like Evans Brothers showed their keen interest in publishing for Africa in 1945 when Dr. H.J. Larcombe, a distinguished educationalist and a consultant of the company, made the first of several visits to West Africa with the task of surveying the book needs in the region, particularly textbooks for

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<sup>40</sup> Diana Athill, *Stet: a Memoir*. (London: Granta, 2001), p. 103.

<sup>41</sup> Hill, p. 122.

<sup>42</sup> T.T. Solaru. “Educational Publishing and textbook production”, in *Publishing in Africa in the Seventies*, ed. Edwaina Oluwasanmi, Eva Mclean and Hans Zell (University of Ife Press: Ile-Ife, 1975), pp. 297 -306.



primary school children. After Larcombe's visit in 1949 Noel Evans, the then Managing Director undertook a second trip. His interest in expanding his company's business in the region started a significant publishing period in which a considerable number of books intended for African primary schools and student teachers were published. The outcome of these visits was the writing and publishing of *Larcombe Progressive Arithmetic Series*, which became an essential text for the primary arithmetic market in West Africa in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. The impressive business returns from successful books such as Larcombe's series and *Evans Primary Course*, *Effective English*, and *Civics for Self Government* by J.R. Bunting convinced the company to establish an office in Nigeria. In 1955 Ove Stentort who operated from Ibadan was effectively covering West Africa. In subsequent years, more representatives were employed, notably Tom Kyei and I.O. Ita both of whom had remarkable careers as Education Officers. They were hired to direct Evans' business in Ghana, and Eastern Nigeria, respectively. Aware of the importance to accompany the educational policies of the newly independent African governments, Evans felt the need to embark on a much ambitious plan. It established Evans Brothers Nigeria Limited in 1966.

In the early sixties, other British publishers followed suit. Their scramble over the African educational market was not restricted to the profit these publishers were to generate out of their sales, but also involved the educational role they were to play. Recalling this period, Julian Rea writes:

In publishing terms this was a period of great excitement. There was, in effect, a clean sheet. New curricula demanded new books, and new books, new authors. For the first time African writers were not merely encouraged but begged to prepare new materials. In many cases the results were a surprise both to the houses undertaking publication and to an educational establishment trained to think of white authors as the key to examination success. Of course, the new thinking was greatly assisted by those Europeans who understood and identified with African scholarly and educational objectives and brought their skills to bear in forwarding them.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Julian Rea, "Aspects of African Publishing 1954—74", p.100.

In East Africa, Longmans was the earliest of British publishers to start a small business and appoint a resident representative in Nairobi. Not long after the company was soon joined by other British publishers.<sup>44</sup> After Independence, Longman made effort to produce books to suit the new policy of 'Africanising' education which was in vogue. The fundamental idea of nationalising education was to incorporate the best of the colonial education legacy as well as devise and implement new educational policies. In 1965 Longmans was incorporated locally and registered under its new name, Longman of Kenya limited. The same year two more local companies were established in Uganda and Tanzania. On a parallel level, the OUP was an active publisher in the region. In 1952, it opened its office in Nairobi to facilitate book imports and promote the company's sales in the region. Ten years later, it established its branch in Nairobi under the management of Charles Richards. Soon after, publishing units of the OUP Eastern Africa were established in Lusaka, Addis Ababa and Dar es Salam, and agents were appointed in several other countries including Uganda.

These developments in the African publishing scene did not go unnoticed by Hill. Three years earlier, during his South Asian – Australian tour, he had vowed to catch up with Longmans and OUP. Although his interest in Africa came rather late, Hill seemed eager to compete and invest in the African publishing and eventually succeeded in building two of the most powerful publishing companies in East and West Africa – HEB East Africa and HEB Nigeria. The major steps he made and the policies he followed to achieve this goal form the substance of the next sections.

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<sup>44</sup> Henry Chakava, *Publishing in Africa: one man's perspective*. (Chestnut Hill, Mass.: Bellagio Publications; Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1996), p.6. Nairobi was not only the Kenya capital, but also the headquarters of the East Africa High Commission, an organisation setup by the East African colonial governors in 1948 to co-ordinate development of common territorial services as the East African Literature Bureau. The latter's head was Charles Richards who encouraged and facilitated the business of British Publishers' undertaking in the region.



HEB's publishing policies in Africa were deeply influenced by Hill who perceived his role not only as an ordinary metropolitan publisher interested in expanding his business and increasing his sales figures, but also as having a cultural and educational mission. This complex position is clearly conveyed in *In Pursuit of Publishing*. It was his achievement to have fostered cultural and commercial ties between Britain and its former colonies. While his autobiography provides the reader with abundant details relating to sales figures, the amalgamations and takeovers in the post-war publishing scene, it also allows Hill's own self image to merge in the multiple cultural, historical, and political narratives of his own time.

His 'pursuit of publishing' has interesting beginnings. Upon his return to work for William Heinemann as a manager of the educational department, Hill focused his efforts for the first ten years on strengthening the financial position of this department. Once the home base was established, Hill began to think of expanding the map of the business abroad. Thus, in April 1956 Hill undertook a publishing tour through South Asia and Australia. It was in Bombay, where he spent three days, that he discovered the potential of overseas markets, and was motivated by the presence of other leading British publishers such as Longman and OUP to step in and explore the opportunities of the Commonwealth publishing market. This first contact with Bombay's bookshops, schools, the university and the Education Department not only revealed "the pervasive strength of the English language", but also provided an impressively useful example of British publishing expansion overseas to follow. He "now realised what the Oxford University Press and Messrs Longman had been up to, during those long years when [he] was preoccupied with UK market. Wherever [he] went, in fact, Longman and OUP had been there before [him]. It was a situation that needed to be reversed."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Hill, p.93.

Elsewhere Hill recalls stopping in Karachi where he was welcomed in the Ministry of Information, a place where he learnt that English was to be the medium of instruction in the fast-developing Pakistan school system. Once again the bookshops “confirmed the growing reliance on the English language – whose pre-eminence is universally recognised in the 1980’s, but was by no means assured thirty or more years before.”<sup>46</sup> Even in the then politically turbulent territories of Malaysia and Singapore, Hill was prepared to explore the educational market’s conditions before moving to a much more stable region. In Australia which appeared to him as “a wonderful market for British books”<sup>47</sup>, Hill was to spend three months investigating the prospects of local educational market. As he found it then, the company’s interest in Australia and New Zealand “was entirely concerned with fiction and general books.”<sup>48</sup> Having no facilities for publishing locally and importing their entire stock-in-trade from Britain, William Heinemann’s offices were eventually engaged in selling books. The Australian branches which were opened in Melbourne (1948) and Sydney (1953) and Auckland, (1955) were founded with the aim of recruiting local authors as well as importing and distributing books published in the U.K.

Not satisfied with the existing conditions, Hill hoped to widen the scope of the company’s operations in these territories to encompass the educational market. His optimism was motivated by the unexplored potentials of the Australian book market and socio-economic conditions of the Australian population. As a result of “the high national income, the high level of popular education, and the absence of competing cultural amenities in areas with such low population densities,” explains Hill, “sales per head of population were far greater than in the UK itself.”<sup>49</sup> The Australian educational system followed the British pattern, and was permeated with British expatriates. While the short stops in South Asia

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.



were inspiring in many ways, the three months' stay in Australia was long enough to induce Hill to take up a different approach to encouraging long-term publishing investment in a Commonwealth country. As he points out in his memoir,

This dependence on imported books was not to my taste. I wanted to export books to Australia; but even more I wanted to create an Australian business, along the same lines as the business we were developing in England, but one which would publish Australian authors. It was to explore the feasibility of such a project that I spent three months travelling over the entire continent from Brisbane to Perth...<sup>50</sup>

Back in London, Hill started thinking about practical ways of carrying out his project of setting up a new branch in Australia. The immediate problem he faced was finding a suitable candidate who would start and run the business. Curiously enough, his choice fell on a local man with no previous work experience in the publishing industry. His plea was that he "always preferred someone new to the game but with first class potential, to a second-rater with experience. The former will rapidly overtake the latter."<sup>51</sup> By 'a first-class', Hill implied not only a sense of perseverance but also of creativity.<sup>52</sup> On the subject of how to perceive this creative quality, Hill noted that it "is an art for which there are no guide lines."<sup>53</sup> It appears that his idea of the right candidate dovetails with his own projection of his own beginnings as a publisher. A graduate of Jesus College in the University of Cambridge, Hill seemed to hold a strong belief that first-class university education coupled with a sense of independence was essential to the making of a successful publisher. In his autobiography he notes that

...the firm's rise may have seemed a conventional business success story; but for me it was the implementation of a morality which had its roots deep in the past. In Chapter One, I trace these roots to my upbringing in the

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p.102.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p.114.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

rigorous tradition of nonconformist radicalism; and Chapter Nine suggests how this tradition found expression in a business style which was to be successful throughout the English-speaking world.<sup>54</sup>

It was Nicholas Hudson whom Hill eventually hired to run the educational business in Australia. A graduate of Oxford University, Hudson had read the Classics and had acquired some editorial experience. Besides, despite his “Pommy accent”, Hudson “was [a] large, articulate and highly extroverted person. It was his total informality and lack of protocol, combined with his Quaker egalitarianism, which convinced me he would be a success in Australia.”<sup>55</sup> In New Zealand too, Hill found a young man, David Heap, who seemed to embody some of the qualities he cherished. Heap who graduated from a Teachers’ college was appointed in 1962 by Bill Moore, the Manager of William Heinemann’s branch in New Zealand. During a visit to the country in March 1962, Hill recalled being “instantly impressed by this youngster, and [he] asked him to concentrate on the educational market.” In his words, “young David Heap was the man for the hour, and he was soon on his way to becoming the pre-eminent educational publisher in New Zealand. His life style was in many respects a replica of my own early years.”<sup>56</sup>

My point is that the lessons which Hill learnt during this publishing tour and the policy he designed and employed with regards to the Australian educational market provided an instructive example to follow and implement in Africa. His project there started to take shape early in 1960, when Evan McKay Milne, known as Van Milne, joined Heinemann’s Educational Department. It was on the margin of a conference on education organised in Edinburgh in mid 1959 that Hill invited Milne to join his company knowing that the man had “had a flaming row with his managing Director.”<sup>57</sup> The three-year period

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. xi. Elsewhere he referred to a set of “ethos”: “I instantly fell back on the radical, Puritanical values of my youth, with their emphasis on rugged individualism, participatory democracy and the Protestant work ethic. It was these three elements which formed the basic ingredients of the publishing environment which I now created.” See Hill, p. 185.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 118.



which Milne spent with Heinemann proved to be remarkably productive. Although little has been written about Milne, he probably was close in character to the personality of Hill than many of the agents and editors he had worked with. Not only did the two men share similar political convictions and were “quite committed in left-wing politics”,<sup>58</sup> but also had similar backgrounds. Both were the children of educators: Hill’s father was a headmaster and Milne’s was a schoolteacher. Both graduated from the University of Cambridge, and both joined the Royal Air Force during the Second World War. Hill started as Aircraftman Second Class and ended as Squadron Leader, while Milne had a notable career as RAF pilot of a Lancaster bomber, which earned him a Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC)— an award which Hill made sure to cite in his autobiography as a sign of his admiration and respect for his associate.<sup>59</sup>

But Hill’s appreciation of Milne’s skill and experience dates back to the late 1950s. Certainly Milne’s seven years experience as a publisher focused on the African world was of great value to Hill’s project. Milne had particularly acquired a high reputation for being the publisher of Kwame Nkrumah’s first book. The story being that shortly before Ghana achieved its independence, it was revealed that the then Prime Minister of the Gold Coast was about to submit his autobiography for publication. The bidding publishers were Longmans. After securing a meeting with Nkrumah, Milne was able to convince the Ghanaian leader to give the manuscript to Nelson instead. It was perhaps not accidental that when Milne left Nelson for Heinemann, Nkrumah decided to place his manuscripts with Heinemann, notably *I Speak of Freedom* (1961), *Africa Must Unite* (1962), *Consciencism* (1964), and *Neo-Colonialism* (1965), which appeared in the AWS as No.45.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p123. Sambrook, Interview by Gail Low, 6 February 2004 (Unpublished interview obtained from Dr. Low in December 2005).

<sup>58</sup> See Appendix One. Currey, interview by author, 23 August 2005. The first part of this interview has been published in James Currey and Nourdin Bejjit, “AWS, Chinua Achebe, and All those Books” *African Writing*, No. 4. (2008), <http://www.african-writing.com/four/interviews.htm>.

<sup>59</sup> Hill, 123.

Milne's strong interest in African politics led him also to publish the autobiography of the impending President of Zambia, Kenneth Kaunda, titled *Zambia Shall Be Free*. In his search of authors for the newly launched AWS, he busied himself with the publishing activities of the East African Literature Bureau (EALB) with which he was working "on the publication of books arising from the work of E.A. Creative writing Committee."<sup>60</sup> One of these books was Ngugi's *The Black Messiah* which was later published in the AWS as *The River Between*. Milne's major contribution to HEB was his launch of the AWS which came to be associated with Hill alone. But against his 'supreme egoism', Hill never denied the productive role of Milne in setting the Series on the right track.<sup>61</sup> At the end of 1962, six months after the launch of the Series, Milne decided to leave HEB for his old firm, Nelson which then came under a new management. His significant input was recognized by his successors and had sustained effect on the trajectory of the series and the publishing of African literature at large.

In terms of HEB's expansion, Milne was responsible for starting HEB's Nigerian branch in 1961 and recruiting Chief Daniel Olorunfemi Fagunwa, as a Manager. Not only was Fagunwa a well established writer, but his experience as an Education Officer seemed also a valuable asset for the job. It is significant that the agents hired by British publishers had mostly the profile of educators. There are, however, few sketchy details about how Fagunwa became the first Manager of HEB and what his role entailed. Hill's memoir does not provide any information other than the man was enlisted by Milne and later was "drowned in an unexplained circumstance while crossing the River Niger."<sup>62</sup> His death

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<sup>60</sup> Charles Richards, Nairobi, to Hill, London, 21 February 1963, HEB 4/4, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>61</sup> Hill was described to me by Sambrook as "a supreme egoist". <sup>61</sup> Sambrook, Interview by author, 19 September 2005. See Appendix 2, p.230. Hill neither explicitly admit in his memoir that it was Milne's idea to launch the AWS, nor does he admit the fact in his interviews. The only time I came across a direct acknowledgement that the series was Milne's idea occurs in a short article published in *Research in African Literatures*. See Hill, "The African Writers Series," *Research in African Literatures* Vol. I, No 1 (1971):18-20.

<sup>62</sup> See Hill, pp. 129 and 207.



perhaps brought Milne's chapter to a close and allowed Sambrook the opportunity to carry out new plans for HEB's growth.

Sambrook had joined Nelson in 1954 as an overseas editor and worked under Milne who became overseas manager. Besides "looking after Nelson's educational textbook interest in West Africa," Sambrook's work at Nelson involved helping the University College of the Gold Coast and University College Ibadan set up university presses. The task was part of an arrangement Nelson had made with the two institutions. When Milne moved to Heinemann in mid of 1959, Sambrook took over as Nelson's Overseas Manager, a role which he would exchange again with Milne, when the latter decided to rejoin Nelson at the end of 1962. Recalling these incidents, Sambrook stated in a recent interview that

During 1962, Nelsons was sold to Roy Thompson.... So, once Thompson owned Nelson, they started to think of changing the nature of its publishing, and they approached Van Milne, who was in Heinemann, to ask him if he would go back and develop, among other things, what we call in the publishing trade, an English language list which he was personally interested in. During 1962, I had various discussions with Van and with the Thompson people about what role I would play, whether they wanted to go on publishing in Africa or for Africa.... And in the middle of this, Alan Hill, then approached me and said: "Look, Van Milne wants to go back to do this in Nelsons, why don't you come and join us?" So, we, more or less, exchanged the jobs during the late months of 1962, and I started with Heinemann on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, 1963.<sup>63</sup>

Backed by a publishing experience of three years at Manchester University Press and nine years at Nelson, Sambrook was well qualified to effectively fulfil Hill's ambitious publishing plans and lead HEB into a new phase of overseas expansion. Two months after the death of Fagunwa, Sambrook issued a memorandum providing a detailed job description for a representative in Nigeria. "Our main need", he wrote,

is for a representative who will show our books to teachers in secondary schools, teacher training colleges and universities. He should be the sort of person who can talk about books to these levels of the teaching profession and find out from them how the books we have already published can best be used in Nigerian schools and

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<sup>63</sup> Sambrook, Interview by author, 19 September 2005. See Appendix 2, p.230.

colleges. In this way, too, he should be able to discover what new books are needed and in the course of his work meet people who are most likely to be our future educational authors. This is the best way in which we can build up a list in Nigeria. A very important feature of the job is to keep right up to date with educational trends, and to do this it is essential to mix with people in the universities and Ministry Departments, both socially and professionally.<sup>64</sup>

The strong need for a charismatic representative in Nigeria seemed to match the special attention given to the development of an educational list for the Nigerian market. Aside from the AWS, the list at the time contained books for secondary schools up to Higher School Certificate, a smaller number of books for undergraduate and postgraduate work and a growing list of special publications for Nigerian primary schools. The job was to involve a fair amount of travelling throughout Nigeria, and to a lesser extent Sierra Leone and Ghana.<sup>65</sup> Hill and Sambrook did not advertise the vacancy, but rather depended “on personal recommendations of people who might be able to do this job. Achebe came up with one or two people, but strong suggestions came from” Derek Jeffares, a man Sambrook “knew very well.”<sup>66</sup> Jeffares recommended one of his former students, Higo, whom both Hill and Sambrook went to Nigeria to interview in March 1964. Hill explained his classical reasons for ultimately choosing Higo for the job:

[H]e was exactly the sort of overseas manager I liked to appoint: someone first-rate but new to the game, rather than a second-rater with lots of experience. His traditional upbringing had given him integrity and loyalty. A first-class university education had refined and disciplined his natural ability, so that it was always a cerebral experience to deal with him.<sup>67</sup>

In addition to his outstanding academic performance as a postgraduate in Leeds University, Higo had some interesting aspects to his profile. He was a poet whose name was by then

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<sup>64</sup> Sambrook, Inter-Memo, “Representative in Nigeria”, 20 December 1963, HEB 39/1. Special Collections, University of Reading, Reading.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Sambrook, Interview by author, 19 September 2005. See Appendix 2, p.233

<sup>67</sup> Hill, p. 208.



familiar to Hill and Sambrook. His poems had appeared in the *Penguin Modern Poetry from Africa* (1963) and in *A Book of African Verse* (AWS, No.8, 1964). Sambrook revealed that the “combination of a practising poet, a training college lecturer and a secondary school headmaster [not only] sounded enticingly attractive for HEB whose main business was predominantly books for schools and colleges,” but also useful to expand the AWS and the “challenging search for good writing from novelists, poets, [and] dramatists.”<sup>68</sup> Higo seemed to make a good team-mate with Achebe, who was the Editorial Advisor to the Series. They were both in their early thirties and had been at the University College of Ibadan besides their active engagement in the work of the Mbari Club. It was hoped that their combined efforts would give impetus to the AWS by bringing in new writers from the whole region.

When Higo started his role as HEB's Nigerian Manager on 1 January 1965, his countryman, Achebe had been Editorial Advisor to the AWS for over two years – a position he was invited to occupy by Hill. The idea of recruiting Achebe apparently occurred during the Makerere conference in 1962 when Achebe was approached by a young barely known author by the name James Ngugi for a feedback on a novel he had written, *Weep Not, Child*. Achebe's reputation and appeal to young authors made him stand out as useful advisor for the Series. Hill's account of this early moment shows the importance of Achebe for the AWS:

I felt the need for General Editor 'on the ground' to develop the series. So in November 1962 I sent out my number two, Tony Beal, to Nigeria to meet Chinua Achebe to invite him to be General Editor. The two met in Lagos, in the Bristol Hotel, and Chinua at once said 'Yes'. He accepted and we were in business. His role was crucial. Not only did he read every MS, in some cases undertaking editorial work, but he would identify good new authors for their series. His very presence was a magnet for would-be writers during the ten years of his editorship.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Sambrook, “Aig Higo: In Honour of a Publishers' publisher,” in *Issues in Book Publishing in Nigeria: Essays in Honour of Aigboje Higo at 70*, ed. F.A. Adesanoye and A. Ojeniyi (Ibadan: HEB Nigeria Plc, 2005), pp: 3-7, 6.

<sup>69</sup> Peterson and Rutherford, *Chinua Achebe: A Celebration*, p.151. See also Hill, p.123.

Many commentators claimed that Achebe performed his role as an advisor to the series without pay.<sup>70</sup> The archives of the AWS, however, reveal that HEB had an agreement with Achebe whereby he was paid a fee of £150 per annum.<sup>71</sup> This amount increased to a £250 by 1967.<sup>72</sup> While it may appear a meagre sum by nowadays' standards, one could only compare it to the £1200 per annum Abdulrazak Gurnah received for serving as editorial advisor to the Series thirty years later to recognize that it was a reasonable sum in its period. Regardless of the fee, the advantage for Achebe was having his name printed on the prelims of all books published or reprinted in the Series which was a sufficient acknowledgment of his services and good publicity for the man and his works.

But how important was Achebe to HEB as an editorial advisor? The Series could have been edited by any writer or critic, African or otherwise, who had a keen interest and knowledge in African literature. HEB probably used Achebe's name to promote the sales and the image of the infant series. Technically, having an international publisher's series of African books primarily for Africans edited by an African in the heady days of decolonisation seemed in order with Hill's policies. The AWS was seen a valuable means of exposing and emphasising the cultural role of HEB in Africa, a subtle tool that served the purpose of prestige and public relations. It became as, Currey explains,

partly accidentally, an exploitative part of Heinemann's strategy in Africa. Again and again it gave Heinemann a presence which seemed far greater than the real size and strength of the firm. It was a key factor in enabling Heinemann to seize educational contracts from under the noses of established companies with a far longer presence than upstart Heinemann.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> For example: Becky Clarke claims that Achebe "performed [his role as the Series editor] shockingly for ten years without pay". See Becky Clarke, "The African Writers Series – Celebrating Forty Years of Publishing Distinction", *Research in African Literatures* 34, No.2 (Summer 2003): 163-74. Nahem Yousaf says: "Achebe's expertise was offered without expectation of payment". See Nahem Yousaf, *Chinua Achebe* (Devon: Northcote House Publishers Ltd, 2003), p. 31.

<sup>71</sup> Sambrook, to D.L. Range, 23 January 1964, HEB 6/10, Special Collections, University of Reading, Reading.

<sup>72</sup> Sambrook, to Mrs Marron, 16 June 1967, Special Collections, University of Reading, Reading.

<sup>73</sup> Currey, "African Writers Series: 21 Years On," p.11.



The name of Achebe, who had become the pride of many Africans, seemed part of this “exploitative strategy”, but which was also reciprocally used by Achebe himself to promote his name, works, and African literature at large. It can also be argued that the use of Achebe’s name was similarly geared to produce a different effect, specifically marketing the AWS in the West as an ‘authentic’ literary series edited and supervised by an African who had already been confirmed as the most important African writer, and whose *Things Fall Apart* was celebrated as the ‘first’ influential African novel in English. Interestingly, Achebe’s name continued to be used as the “Founding Editor” on the prelims of every title published in the Series until 1986, though he had resigned his editorial job way back in 1972.

Hill’s choice and invitation of Achebe to play a role in the development of the AWS remained far from being innocent of the broad expansion publishing strategy he set out to implement outside Britain. With regards to the African market, Achebe and Higo, with the support of Sambrook and later Currey, contributed a great deal to the establishment of HEB in West Africa. The Nigerian civil war caused various difficulties, but the growth of the HEB’s branch in Ibadan was assured by the increase of its sales from £70,000 in 1968 to £195,000 in 1970. The branch’s transformation into a fully fledged company in 1969 – with Higo as the Managing Director, Hill as Chairman and Achebe as member of the board of directors – was an indication of such a growth and a significant move into strengthening HEB’s position in the African market. By 1976, HEB (Nigeria) “was the leading overseas firm in the HEB group, with a turnover of £2,382,000 (over £6 million by 1987 value) equally split between local publishing and imported books.”<sup>74</sup>

All things considered, Hill’s pledge to acquire a share in West African educational market was mainly fulfilled by his wise choice of suitable candidates. The success of their

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<sup>74</sup> Hill, p. 122.

efforts owes much to Hill's effective policy and a deep commitment to transform a small educational department into a major international company.

## **-VII-**

By 1967 Hill's project for HEB's expansion in Africa entered a new phase. Early in the year, he had invited Currey to take charge of educational and textbook publishing for Africa, "and to run the African Writers Series as his specialism." The reason for Currey's appointment was the growing understanding that HEB "were on to something big and that [they] could no longer run the African Writers Series as an 'add-on' to [their] educational publishing."<sup>75</sup> Indeed as Currey himself admits, he "was able to come in at the time when Heinemann had realised that it really did have potential."<sup>76</sup> After its initial success, HEB's African project needed more attention. Until early 1967 HEB's business in Africa was conducted by a group of HEB's employees. The archive of HEB at the University of Reading reveals the extent to which various senior staff such as Hill, Tony Beal, Edward Thompson, Hamish MacGibbon, and other junior editors were all in some measure involved in its management and development as a collective task. Nevertheless, while being partially responsible for HEB in Africa, Sambrook was strongly interested in expanding HEB's business in the Caribbean and South Asia, which appeared to be affecting his concentration on the African market.<sup>77</sup>

The need to recruit a qualified individual to look after the African business became necessary towards the end of 1966. Currey's previous experience at the Oxford University Press made him a favourite candidate. He had not only been in charge of the Three Crowns, but had also published a wide variety of academic books on Africa as well as

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<sup>75</sup> Peterson and Rutherford, *Chinua Achebe: A celebration*, p.154.

<sup>76</sup> Currey, Interview by Author, 23 August 2005. See Appendix 1, p.215.

<sup>77</sup> For example, there are various letters forwarded to African authors by Sambrook's secretary explaining that Sambrook would answer their queries after his return from Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong or the Caribbean.



textbooks, particularly at university level. “When Alan Hill interviewed me,” he explains, “we talked about educational and text-book publishing for Africa. Only when the interview seemed to be coming to an end did he ask me whether I would be interested in working on the African Writers Series.”<sup>78</sup>

At the time when that interview took place, Hill’s plan for further investment in the African market was already drawn. Currey’s recruitment seemed only a matter of paving the way for enlarging HEB’s operation to include East Africa. Four months later, Hill landed in Nairobi from which he embarked on a regional tour for several weeks with the single aim of exploring the potentials of the African educational market. Whether in Kenya, Tanzania, or Uganda, Hill was impressed by the visible growth of education at all levels, as the following tables indicate:

Table 4: Total Enrolment in Primary School in East African, 1965 – 1971 (in Thousands)<sup>79</sup>

	65/66	66/67	67/68	68/69	69/70	70/71
Kenya	1.043.4	1.133.2	1.209.7	1.282.3	1.428	1.525.5
Tanzania	741	753.1	764.1	776.1	828	902.9
Uganda	564.2	568.8	563.6	709.7	720.1	782.6

Table 5: Total Enrolment in Secondary School to School Certificate Level in East African, 1965 – 1971 (in Thousands)<sup>80</sup>

	65/66	66/67	67/68	68/69	69/70	70/71
Kenya	61	86	98.2	121	126.9	140.7
Tanzania	22.3	25.6	28	30	31.2	32.6
Uganda	20	25.2	29.5	33.6	40	37.5

This obvious increase in school enrolment had been overlooked by HEB’s representative in the region, Heinemann and Cassell Ltd. The office which had been opened by both

<sup>78</sup> Currey, “Africa Writes back” ( Manuscript),p.12.

<sup>79</sup> John Hanson and D.J.S. Crozier, *Report on the Supply of Secondary Level Teachers in English-Speaking Africa* (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1974). The authors state that the data was provided to them by Ministry of Education officials or taken from Annual Reports of the Ministries of Education in the respective countries.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

William Heinemann and Cassell in 1965 was intended to sell British imported books and cater primarily “to the well-heeled European population, together with some educational titles to the European-style secondary schools.”<sup>81</sup> Hill’s perception of the “mass market” was “somewhat different from those of Messrs Heinemann and Cassell.”<sup>82</sup> “With markets such as these,” he explained, “Heinemann and Cassell Ltd made no sense to me, and on my return I arranged for HEB to buy out this company.”<sup>83</sup>

The newly acquired company became HEB (East Africa) in 1968. Its existing manager, Robert Charles Markham, also known as Bob Markham, became Managing Director. His long experience as a bookseller was very much valued by Hill. Moreover, like Milne, Markham was a “wartime RAF pilot, who had demonstrated his powers of survival by force-landing a Catalina flying boat in the Sahara Desert.”<sup>84</sup> His wide East African connections from government ministers to ‘East African intelligentsia’ was seen as useful in establishing HEB’s East African branch. Markham’s responsibility was to put into practice HEB’s overseas policy: “to build up the sales of imported books as a basis for moving into local publishing, and so becoming an integral part of the country’s educational and cultural life.”<sup>85</sup> Under Markham’s direction, this policy paid off. HEB’s sales in Kenya alone increased from £57,000 in 1967 to 157,000 in 1972. Yet, notwithstanding Markham’s achievement, Hill’s “shrewd gaze in the seeds of time” led him to think of a possible successor to Markham who after all was a British expatriate and already a middle age man.

His successor was Henry Chakava, a young Kenyan citizen aged twenty-five who had received “a brilliant First [Class Honours] at the University of Nairobi – where Professor Andy Gurr rated him his best student for ten years”. As he notes in his memoir,

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<sup>81</sup> Hill, p. 227

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. p.228.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.



Hill was deeply impressed with Chakava's academic merits. The young African "had been educated in the true sense of the word; he had intellectual depth, a warm personality and true modesty."<sup>86</sup> Initially Chakava was hired as a trainee editor, probably a temporary job in the hope of joining a British or American university. It turned out to be a permanent position. "Within a few weeks of my joining," recalls Chakava, "Alan Hill, made a visit to Nairobi to meet me, and was sufficiently impressed to arrange a full training program for me, culminating in a six months' attachment at Heinemann's head office, in London."<sup>87</sup> Upon his return to Nairobi in December 1973, he was informed by David Hill to prepare himself to take the responsibility of Publishing Manager before he was promoted to Managing Director after the departure of Bob Markham in April 1976.

The appointment of Chakava proved successful and realised Hill's early plans for getting into the African book market. What is remarkable about the way Hill appointed his team is the difference between those he recruited to serve at the company's headquarters in London and those he employed in the company's branches. The first were highly skilled individuals who had spent years in the business of book publishing while the second had to be trained or learn the job under the guidance and supervision of the former. Not only did this strategy conform to a larger policy adopted by European countries to help transfer expertise and knowledge to African countries before and after independence, but it also served HEB's interest in keeping control over the operation of these branches for many years before the latter were partly Africanised in the mid 1970s and completely during the late 1980s and early 1990s.

All things considered, Hill's emphasis on the human factor in the making of HEB's growth and success remains central to his perception of the image of the good publisher. He explains:

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., pp. 246-247.

<sup>87</sup> Henry Chakava, *Publishing in Africa: One Man's Perspective* (Oxford: Bellagio Publications; Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1996), pp.1-2.

In the first place, as an individualist, I have always firmly believed in one-man publishing as opposed to decisions taken by a committee. This does not mean of course that the one man should ignore the expertise and contribution available from others.... I have always believed that the publisher should be a lonely figure, solely responsible for his decisions.... So the expansion of HEB was achieved, not by building the conventional company pyramid of tiers and departments – editorial, design, production etc. – but by adding on successive one-man publishing units. Each unit was self-contained, consisting of a publisher, his own editorial set-up, production manager, and secretaries.<sup>88</sup>

Although he retired in 1979, Hill was invited in 1986 by Mike Esplen and Richard Gale to be a consultant of HEB. By then, his association with Heinemann had been the longest among all his colleagues. He had served in the company since 1936, a time during which he rose from an Assistant Editor in William Heinemann's small Educational Department to the Managing Director of the Heinemann Group. Today, HEB, the company he had helped to build into a major international publishing house has been taken over by other conglomerates and its name ceased to exist. Hill's name, however, is still remembered as one of last publishers of the "gentleman" era. More significantly, he is more remembered for the role he played in the publishing of African literature. Acknowledging this, Hill sees the publication of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* "in 1958 as a remarkable episode [which] changed the direction of [his] publishing life and added a new dimension to the firm's list"<sup>89</sup>. Perhaps Achebe's Foreword to Hill's memoir summarises it all: paving the way and supporting the AWS remains Hill's enduring legacy.

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<sup>88</sup> Hill, pp.185-86.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, p. 120.



## *Chapter Two*

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### *The African Writers Series: History, Editorship and Markets*

The AWS represents a remarkable case in the publishing history of world literature. Its particularity rises from the fact that it was produced by a British publishing house, namely HEB which sought to bring together an extensive range of original African works. These works varied from creative to biographical writings, and echoed the rich multilingual and multicultural African voices then in the making. The Series has not only succeeded in giving shape to a body of African literatures through a unifying structure and corporate institution, it also, over four decades, defined the artistic qualities and ideological tendencies with which African literature has come to be associated today.

Achebe and Ngugi among others are today recognised not only as Nigerian or Kenyan writers but as postcolonial African authors whose works have had a worldwide appeal. The publication of their works in the AWS has allowed for a wide dissemination of African literature, and contributed to the creation of a critical sensitivity, among readers and critics alike and in various parts of the world, to its distinct qualities and values. An important amount of critical scholarship has in the meantime been produced by scholars with diverse theoretical orientations, indicating the relevance of African realities and experiences to audiences in the metropolis and elsewhere. Most importantly today, African literature written in or translated into English is appreciated as a 'writing back' to the empire, a counter-intellectual force that serves to increase our understanding of colonial and post-colonial conditions. This chapter, therefore, seeks to shed light on various aspects of publishing the AWS. It provides a brief historical survey of the rise, development and the eventual crisis befalling the Series.

The birth of AWS series dates back to February 1962 when Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* was first published in a paperback format by HEB. The series' conception, however, preceded such a date. It was during Hill's journey to Africa that he realised that Achebe's promising novel had failed a year after its publication to reach university lecturers and students in Nigeria, and presumably to secondary schools students and general readers too. It was an epiphany – one might call it a *coup de foudre* – which a commercial visionary like Hill sought in such a cultural encounter with the African educational space. What is more, he came to realise that since "African bookshops sold nothing but educational books, the mass market outlets were already [there] on [such] terms."<sup>1</sup> Such a finding explained why William Heinemann as a general fiction – trade – publisher failed to reach African readership. With its small print-run of 2000 copies of *Things Fall Apart* and a cover price of 15s that by African standards was far too high for a novel, William Heinemann was not in the position to undertake the task of marketing Achebe in Africa. How was the book to get into the hands of African readers? It was a dilemma that required resolution.

By the end of 1959, Hill recruited Milne, "Nelson's highly regarded West Africa specialist."<sup>2</sup> Milne had taught English at University College of the Gold Coast for two years before joining Nelson Publishers. His experience as a teacher and publisher had prepared him well for the task of implementing Hill's innovative but abstract publishing ideas. In a rather complacent tone, Hill explained how Milne's appointment "was the key to our success" since he "was able to give precision to my general idea."<sup>3</sup> The plan, Hill declared, "was to start a paperback series, confined to black African authors; the books

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<sup>1</sup> Hill, p.123.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



were to be attractively designed with high quality production, and sold at a very cheap price - as low as 25p at the outset.”<sup>4</sup>

It took only two years for such a plan to bear fruits. *Things Fall Apart* appeared in a paperback format followed by Ekwensi’s *Burning Grass* and Kaunda’s *Zambia Shall Be Free*. The three volumes which now formed the foundation of the Series reflected a variation both in subject matter and genre, indicating its distinctiveness. Perhaps the salient feature of the Series was its outspoken ‘Africanness’. The initial plan to confine the series “to black African authors” and “make available the works of Africa’s most outstanding writers to schools and colleges as well as to the general reader” meant that neither form nor political ideology were as significant as the overall African racial and cultural roots which bound together the then burgeoning African writings. More specifically the particularity of the Series resulted from HEB’s tendency to fill a gap in the publishing scene hitherto overlooked by other British publishers operating in Africa. Although there had been isolated cases in which African writers had their works published internationally, there was no formal publishing project committed exclusively to African writing.

The only major rival, the Three Crowns, started in 1961 by Oxford University Press, was originally planned as an outlet for British expatriates to publish their work about Africa, such as G.B. Masfield’s *Famine: Its Prevention and Relief* (1963) and Mary Benson’s *Chief Albert Lutuli of South Africa* (1963). The series acquired a “brand image” by publishing Wole Soyinka’s plays. They were soon followed by Leopold Senghor’s *Prose and Poetry* (1963), Lewis Nkosi’s *The Rhythm of Violence* (1963), J. P. Clark’s *Three Plays* (1964) and *Odizi* (1964), and Tewfik Al-Hakim’s *The Tree Climber* (1964) to mention only a few. In short, the Three Crowns limited its scope to publishing plays and occasional collections of short stories and poetry.<sup>5</sup> On the contrary, the centripetal force of

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

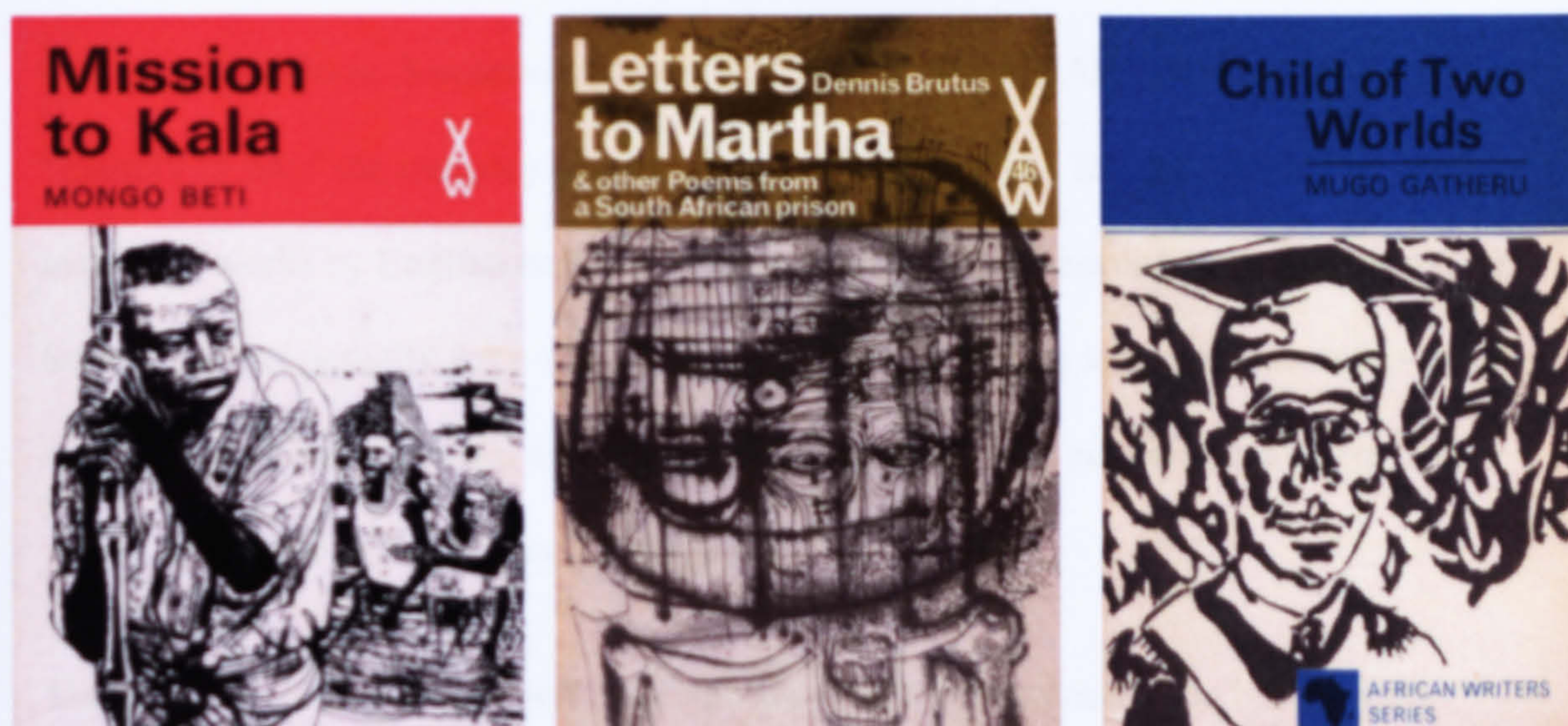
<sup>5</sup> For more on the Three Crowns Series, see Caroline Davies, “The Politics of Postcolonial Publishing Oxford University Press’s Three Crowns Series 1962–1976,” *Book History* 8, (2005): pp. 227–44.



the AWS was its inclusiveness of various genres, though it was fiction that eventually made the greater share of its publishing interest.

The homogeneous mantle which the AWS as an all-inclusive imprint displayed had possibly been premeditated as a marketing strategy. The series' uniformity not only allowed readers a choice of reading particular texts, but also brought to their notice a mixture of other titles embodying a wide range of genres, writers, and 'nationalities'. Interestingly, from 1962 to 1986 the preliminary pages of any book published in the series contained an updated list of the Series' titles classified by number, genre and name of authors. A basic form of classification was also exhibited through a colour coding system – orange for fiction, blue for non-fiction, and green for poetry and drama. While this basic mode of categorisation was clearly employed to highlight the variation in genres, the prominent series number seemed to indicate continuity if not a visible sign attesting to an accumulation of texts written by Africans.

*Samples of the AWS covers used between 1962 and 1986*



During the sixties, the Series gained international reputation as scores of volumes of African writing appeared in print and established the series as the most important publishing outlet for African writers. But the path was not always easy. Indeed, this ambitious project seemed to face a serious challenge after its first year, namely how to



develop the series in such a way that would fulfil to its primary target, the educational market. For Sambrook, who joined HEB in January 1963, the first three titles, together with Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* available for reprint in the AWS, did not make a series. The novels, he explained, were "aimed at school and college readership. Yet *Zambia Shall be Free* [was] clearly of interest to the people of 'Rhodesia' and those who were interested in African politics."<sup>6</sup> Sambrook, who took over Milne's, seemed anxious to avoid the 'improvised' experiment of his predecessor and eager to make sure the Series achieve its original objective of publishing African books primarily for the African educational market.

When he had taken his position at HEB, Sambrook had to deal with several uncompleted tasks. Besides a manuscript of Ngugi's *Weep Not, Child*, he found an unedited draft of T.M. Aluko's *One Man, One Matchet*, some correspondence with Ekwensi about *People of the City*, a novel that had been published in Britain by Andrew Dakers in 1954, and others with John Reed about an anthology of African poetry which he would put together with Clive Wake, both of whom were teaching at the University College of Rhodesia. Sambrook realised that both Ngugi and Aluko's manuscripts did not "entirely fit into" the category of educational texts, though he felt they might "be used instead of works by English and American authors."<sup>7</sup> While, according to Sambrook, the Series "had not actually got a very clear aim,"<sup>8</sup> he was willing to coordinate with various individuals both African and non-African to bring about new publishing projects that would fit into the wider scheme of the Series.

He started with Wake and Reed. Much acquainted with their academic background, Sambrook was eager to publish *A Book of African Verse* (1964, AWS No.8). Reed and Wake's personal experience as educationalists was useful at that point to Sambrook who

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<sup>6</sup> Sambrook, Interview by Author, 19 September 2005, London. See Appendix 2, p. 239.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.232.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. p.232.

benefited from their practical advice which proved to be lasting.<sup>9</sup> Another important connection was Paul Edwards whose influence on the development of the series was equally evident and plainly acknowledged by Sambrook. He had taught English at the Prince of Wales School in Freetown, then took up a lectureship in English in Fourah Bay, before he left West Africa to join the Department of English at the University of Edinburgh.<sup>10</sup> Sambrook had worked with Edwards on an anthology titled *West African Narrative: An Anthology for Schools* (1963) during his years at Nelson. Their editorial collaboration had paved the way for a longer productive relation. Although Edwards's contribution to the Series amounted to a single edition of *Equiano's Travels*, his position as an observer of the African literary landscape, a reviewer, a teacher and a critic rendered him an authority that the editors of the Series reckoned with and frequently solicited for advice.

While there were several individuals who helped widen the scope of the AWS, Ulli Beier's contribution was distinctly greater and included four titles he contributed to the series in the 1960s. A pioneering publisher of African literature, Beier – along with Janheinz Jahn and Gerald Moore – had started the influential journal *Black Orpheus* in 1957 “with the direct aim of translating some of [the Francophone African writers] into English so that they could be known in Nigeria and Ghana.”<sup>11</sup> Besides, the journal published poetry and short stories by hitherto unknown Anglophone African writers. Gabriel Okara, Wole Soyinka, Dennis Brutus, Ama Ata Aidoo, Alex La Guma, John Pepper Clark, for instance, owed their first publications and early recognition to *Black Orpheus*. The success of the literary journal inspired Beier and other important individuals, both African and expatriates, to set up the Mbari Club. In addition to the opportunities it provided for young artists, the Club had its own publishing house, Mbari Publications. Its

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.233.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Peter Benson, “‘Border Operations’: Black Orpheus and the Genesis of Modern African Art and Literature, in *Research of African Literature* V14, No.4 Winter 1983, pp.431-473.



major purpose right from its inception was to encourage and publish young African writers, and make their works available to audiences inside and outside Africa. The first works of some major African writers were thus published by Mbari, namely J.P. Clark's *Song of a Goat* (1961); Alex La Guma's *A Walk in the Night* (1962); Christopher Okigbo's *Heavensgate* (1962); Dennis Brutus's *Sirens, Knuckles, and Boots* (1963); Wole Soyinka's *Three Plays* (1963); Kofi Awoonor's *Rediscovery and other Poems* (1964); and Lenrie Peters's *Poems* (1964). Ulli Beier's publishing and teaching experiences together with his extensive connections with African writers proved valuable to HEB. As Sambrook points out,

Ulli Beier was a very important early publisher of writing in English by African writers, before foreign publishers were interested at all. He realised that his organisation could not give these writers international recognition or provide them with international readership. He was a very important catalyst at that point in developing writing, particularly in West Africa, and with his sort of continental, European view, he was not entirely restricted to what was around him. He saw what was going in the rest of Africa in other languages.<sup>12</sup>

Although Beier published three collections on his own, his first book to appear in the Series was *The Imprisonment of Obatala* published under the African *nom du plume* Obotunde Ijimere. Perhaps HEB's initial decision to limit its publishing of creative writing to 'black' Africans explains Beier's attempt to conceal his German identity and adopt an African name. Beier amusingly drew a very convincing portrait of Ijimere as a man who was born in Western Nigeria in 1930, attended Duro Ladiop's theatre and started writing. Ijimere's pseudonym calls attention to the question of what essentially constitutes African identity. HEB, who probably did not like being fooled by Beier, kept the name of Ijimere as the book's author before the book was put out of print in the mid 1980s. What is significant about such a situation is that it reveals HEB's philosophy of publishing African creative writing. On the other hand, the fact that Beier claimed to have translated the book from Yoruba points out the eminent problem the series was going to face having focused

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<sup>12</sup> Sambrook, Interview by Author. See Appendix 2, p.. 233.

only on texts written originally in English. It was the question of translation that would be treated by HEB's editors in a way that brought about a much successful series than it had ever been.

Although their contribution to the establishment of the AWS remains largely unacknowledged, such expatriates as Ulli Beier, Gerald Moore, David Cook, Janheinz Jahn, Paul Edwards, John Reed, and Andrew Gurr were instrumental in making AWS ascertain itself as the major publishing outlet of African literature. While some of these individuals were teaching in African universities, others moved back to British universities and established new courses in literatures in English. They rendered good services to the Series through editing anthologies and opening up HEB's to a new generation of emerging African writers.

If these expatriates contributed a great deal to shaping the series, Africans' input went beyond the evident writing and submission of manuscripts. Many, in their endeavour to encourage African writing, were keen to provide HEB with suggestions as to who, what and when to publish particular books and writers. The most authoritative African figure was no other than Achebe. His career as a writer seemed intertwined with the launch of the AWS. Their fame was to some extent symbiotic. Unfortunately, the AWS archives at Reading University do not reveal much about the editorship of Achebe. The bits and pieces that one collects, however, are helpful in shedding some light on the man's contribution to series as an editor. It seems that Achebe from the start was involved in performing two roles: searching for and recommending potential manuscripts, and advising the editors of the Series on others manuscripts forwarded to him from London. Achebe's various letters contained in files of other African authors reveal two major facts about this aspect of his contribution. The first, let us reiterate, is that he was active as a General Editor during the period preceding the Nigerian civil war. The second fact is related to the form of his feedbacks, which were normally written as short paragraphs, often in a sentence or two. The overall impression one might get from the archives is that Achebe's opinions were



apparently often decisive in accepting particular titles. However, such opinions, one might argue, came only to support the decisions of HEB's editors as the very few letters in the AWS' archives contain only positive feedbacks. One wonders whether Achebe ever decided against the publication of a book.

## -II-

Besides the numerous original texts which it brought to public attention, HEB also engaged in re-publishing African texts that had already acquired some academic recognition. The first of the texts to go through reprint was Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, which had been published by William Heinemann in 1958. The decision to reprint the novel in a paperback format was appealing to HEB. The reprint of successful titles published in hardback format meant wider success for a paperback edition. A survey of the AWS' list shows how HEB steadily and efficiently undertook the task of reprinting most important works published in or outside Africa.

Initially, HEB reprinted books by writers who had already established their reputation. Cyprian Ekwensi's newly written *Burning Grass* was a source of surprise for Sambrook because orders on the book "have been far in excess of our most optimistic hopes." He explained to the book exporters for the Church Missionary Society how "this has caused difficulties in supplying back orders and ensuring that Longmans have sufficient stock under the new arrangements at Ikeja."<sup>13</sup> Perhaps the initial print-run of 2500 copies underrated the potential sales of a popular writer such as Ekwensi. Now because the experiment proved sales were very good, HEB almost immediately went to reprint his first full-length novel, *People of the City*, which had been published in Britain by Andrew Dakers in 1954. It was issued in the Series as number 5 in 1963. Subsequently HEB bought rights of two of Ekwensi's titles from Hutchinson: *Beautiful Feathers* (1963)

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<sup>13</sup> Sambrook, to Gordon Dawes, 2 October 1963, quoted in Currey, "Africa Writes Back," (Manuscript), p.55. Longman was distributing HEB books in Nigeria

was brought in 1971 and was published as No. 84 and *Jagua Nana* (1961) was re-issued as No. 146 in 1975.

Several other writers had their books reprinted in the AWS. Peter Abrahams' *Mine Boy* was included in the Series as No. 6. This South African novel which had been published in the mid-forties and received with a mixture of views was then re-issued in the AWS. T. M. Aluko's *One Man, One Matchet* published in the AWS as No. 11 in 1965 paved the way for republishing his earlier novel, *One Man, One Wife*, which had come out in Nigeria in 1959. The novel was reissued in the AWS in 1967 as No. 30.

While a number of familiar titles were reissued in the AWS and made available to African readers, some were republished for the sole reason of bringing them to public attention, and ironically proved successful. It appears that AWS had a programme for saving certain texts from the fate of oblivion to which they had been reduced since their first appearance in print. This was particularly the case of *Equiano's Travels*. Recalling the story of its publication, Sambrook states:

I kept in touch with Paul Edwards when he moved from Africa to Edinburgh and we were talking about what next to put into the series because there wasn't anything .... Paul said well, we ought to do something to show there is a history of writing in Africa and so he was working on Equiano and he put together a school edition, a student edition of Equiano, called *Equiano's Travels* which we brought out as No 10, written with an introduction and notes by Paul Edwards, intended purely and simply for students' use. Not a full text - he later did a full text but this was selections from Equiano's writings and it did extremely well. It was one of the best titles in the series - because it opened up a whole different world and Paul was a pioneer in this respect.<sup>14</sup>

Other texts written by Africans such as Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* and Sol Plaatje's *Mhudi* (AWS No. 201, 1978) had undergone unprofessional translation or editing. *Chaka* which was written in Sesotho in 1909 remained unpublished till 1925 perhaps due to the reservations of missionaries at Morija Press in Lesotho with regards to the book's highlight of the conflict between traditional beliefs and Christian values. When it was published by

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<sup>14</sup> Sambrook, Interview by Gail Low, 6 April 2004, London.



Lovedale Press, two chapters which depicted the history and traditions of the Zulus were deleted in the final manuscript. The same publisher later issued the book “in a bowdlerised and bunyanesque English translation in 1931.”<sup>15</sup> The exclusion of the two chapters as explained by Mofolo’s son, Thomas Mofolo Jr., was done in order to reduce the size of the book, “since in those days authors were expected to pay the costs of producing their manuscripts, and the less bulky a manuscript was, the less costly it was to produce.”<sup>16</sup> Given the importance of the book, HEB belatedly commissioned Daniel Kunene to produce a full and uncensored translation from the original 1909 Sesotho text, which was brought out 1981 as No. 229.

Sol Plaatje’s *Mhudi* was condemned to the same fate. Although written in 1912 and acknowledged as the ‘first’ novel in English by a black South African writer, the novel itself was published only in 1930. Tim Couzens and Stephen Gray who edited the book in 1978 revealed the extent to which Lovedale Press “edited the text severely in a deliberate effort to remove what they saw as politically and ideologically subversive material.”<sup>17</sup> What delayed the publication of the novel for so long was the outspoken narrative of pre-colonial South Africa told from the position of the Baralong people. The novel portrays a traditional society in the process of traumatic transition and explains the injustices arising from land distribution in South Africa. In the mid-seventies Stephan Gray worked on unabridged edition of the novel which was published by Quagga Press in 1975 and immediately reissued in the AWS in 1978.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Currey, “Africa Writes Back,” p.210.

<sup>16</sup> Daniel P. Kunene, Introduction to *Chaka*, by Thomas Mofolo (London, Heinemann Educational Books, 1981), p. xii.

<sup>17</sup> Phaswane Mpe, “The Role of the Heinemann African Writers Series in the Development and Promotion of African Literature.” *African Studies* 58, no. 1 (1999): p.106. See also, Tim Couzens and Stephen Gray Source, “Printers’ and Other Devils: The Texts of Sol T. Plaatje’s ‘*Mhudi*’” *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Autumn, 1978): pp. 198-215.

<sup>18</sup> Given that these books were published fifty years before, one could also argue that it was easy for HEB to republish them free of copyright restrictions.

HEB's tendency to reprint African texts was not restricted to previously published books or texts written by successful authors such as Ekwensi. The Series also undertook reprinting 'modern' African books which had either run out of print or had limited circulation. Sambrook's interest in Alex la Guma, for instance, was aroused when Richard Rive was putting together an anthology of African short stories, *Quartet*, which included a contribution by La Guma. From Lagos, Achebe notified Sambrook of the publication of *A Walk in the Night* in Nigeria. The short 'novel' had initially been published in Cape Town in poor stapled paper, and reprinted by Mbari in Ibadan.<sup>19</sup> Acquainted now with the work of the South African writer, Sambrook started to negotiate for the reprint rights with Beier. Mbari had issued 2000 copies of the 'novel' 600, of which remained unsold and for which Sambrook proposed adequate compensation to avoid postponing publication beyond October 1964. When the novel was presented to William Heinemann, it was considered too short to be published alone in hardback. Four short stories which had appeared in *Black Orpheus* were sent to HEB by Beier to make a decent volume. *A Walk in the Night and Other Stories* was finally published in the Series as No.35 in 1967.

### -III-

In their pursuit to publish the best works of African literature, HEB's editors had to be lenient in their approach of developing the infant Series. The entire project was new and original and aroused both criticism and envy. For a progressive man like Sambrook, who during his early career with HEB had modest knowledge of the emerging literary production across the African continent, was a key figure in the development of the Series. It was thanks to his connections and group of advisers and associates that he managed to bring about the enduring success of the series. He recalls listening to Reed and Wake's advice: "Well, look, there is not very much published by African Writers in English which

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<sup>19</sup> Achebe, Lagos, to Sambrook, London, 27 March 1963, HEB 3/8, Special Collections, University of Reading, Reading.



you can reprint in the Series, but there are some extremely good novels in French.”<sup>20</sup> They had in mind books by Francophone African writers such as Camara Laye, Ferdinand Oyono, Mongo Beti, Senghor, David Diop and Sembene Ousmane. The AWS was now on the point of discovering new literary experiments through translation, which eventually expanded the scope of activity as well as the prospects of the series.

Beti's *Mission Terminée* was the first Francophone African novel to be included in the AWS as *Mission to Kala*. Before it appeared in AWS in 1964 as No.13, the novel had been translated by Peter Green and published in a hardback format by Fredrick Muller in Britain. Now as an AWS publication, the novel sold far greater number of copies than the French edition, which was brought out by Editions Buchet/Chastel in Paris in 1957. The experiment proved successful on cultural and commercial levels and invited further investments. Since then Beti became one of the major contributors to the Series in which other books of his were to be published. In 1970, they reissued his third novel, *Le Roi Miraculé*, which had already been published by Frederick Muller in hardback as *King Lazarus*. HEB moved a step further by commissioning Gerald Moore to translate Beti's first novel, *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba*, which was published in France in 1956. It came out in 1971 as *The Poor Christ of Bomba*. Reed and Wake, Sambrook's old companions, continued their collaboration with HEB by translating in 1978 another of Beti's novels, *Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness*. Gerald Moore followed suit by translating *Remember Ruben*, which was brought in the Series in 1980.

Their remarkable efforts succeeded in introducing to the English readers worldwide a number of distinguished Francophone African novelists. Reed translated Ferdinand Oyono's *Une Vie de Boy* (1956) into English as *Houseboy*. It was published in the Series in 1966 as No. 29. According to Currey the novel was among the first titles which presented questions about what was 'appropriate' for a school textbook publisher. In turn Higo observed that while "purists will try to guard schools against it [...] the general reader will

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<sup>20</sup> Sambrook, Interview by Author. See Appendix 2, p.233.

be acquiring a rare gem in African literature.”<sup>21</sup> Indeed HEB’s editors under the guidance of Hill were determined to vindicate their promise to “make available the works of Africa’s most outstanding writers.”<sup>22</sup> In 1967, HEB brought out another of Oyono’s novels, *Le vieux nègre et la médaille*, translated by the indefatigable John Reed as *The Old Man and the Medal* and was put in the Series as No. 39. The inclusion of Beti and Oyono’s novels in the AWS had a great impact on the direction of the Series as it paved the way for many other Francophone African writers to be known in the English speaking world such as L. S. Senghor, David Diop, Sembene Ousmane, Yambo Ouologuem, Cheikh Hamidou Kane, Ahmadou Kourouma, and Mariama Ba among others. The discovery of an entire generation of African writers writing in French increased HEB’s interest in exploring different African literary traditions like Sudanese and Egyptian literatures through translation.

The manuscript of the Sudanese novelist, Tayeb Salih’s *The Wedding of Zein* was brought by Currey to an informal HEB editorial meeting between Achebe and Sambrook. The short novel which had been rejected by OUP was then accepted for publication by HEB, and an entry for an important – but often marginalised – literature was finding a way to English speaking readers. Salih’s *The Wedding of Zein* was published in the AWS early in 1969 followed immediately by his best-selling novel, *Season of Migration to the North*. Denys Johnson-Davies who did the translations was eager to bring more Arab writers having sensed the willingness of HEB’s editors to experiment with the idea. Arabs constituted a significant part of the geographic and social formations of the African continent. Their language is one of the oldest written and one which has been continuously used in most of the northern part of Africa. Given the delicate political situation in the Middle East and the international media interest in the repercussions of the Arab-Israeli war of 1967, there was increasing attention paid to the literary production of the Arabs.

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<sup>21</sup> Higo, Ibadan, to Sambrook, London, 2 March 1966, HEB 5/07 SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>22</sup> The sentence occurs on the second page of the preliminary pages of AWS books published in the early 1960s.



Translators like Johnson-Davies felt that by publishing translation of Arabic texts, readers in the West would have a chance to explore Arabic literature and have an idea about the Arab view of the political and social realities of the region. Writing in *Middle East International*, Johnson-Davies stated that

Arabs have, rightly, been disappointed with the one way stream in the so-called inter-traffic between East and West; some, in times when the relationships are strained, speak – again not unjustly – of cultural colonisation. Certainly in England our publishers, some of whom have done very well out of their markets in the Arab world, have shown great unwillingness to provide channels...<sup>23</sup>

As Currey phrased it, Johnson-Davies “succeeded in giving an idea of what was being written in contemporary Arabic and of the struggles writers were having to fight against the religious and political establishments.”<sup>24</sup> It is significant that most of the Arabic texts selected for the AWS either were critical of the *status quo* or dealt with the controversial issues of sex and religion. Johnson-Davies’s contribution surely was valuable as it enabled the creation of Arab Writers Series in Britain in subsequent years. The greater number of Arabic texts which appeared in the AWS, however, was contributed by well known Egyptian authors such as Taha Hussein, Tawfik Al Hakim, Yossef Idriss and Naguib Mahfouz. The only Maghrebi author to feature in the Series was the Moroccan Driss Chraïbi. The limited interest of the AWS in Maghrebi literature finds its explanation in the bizarre and untenable attitude “that Magrebi writers, however distinguished, were despised in the Arab world for using French.”<sup>25</sup>

#### -IV-

So far, this chapter has covered two of the production methods which were adopted by HEB in the 1960s and pursued in the following decades, a process which would

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<sup>23</sup> Denys Johnson-Davies, quoted in Currey, “Africa Writes back,” (manuscript), p.238.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.239.

ascertain the fate and establish the reputation of Series. Reissuing titles written in or translated into English however vital to the formation of the Series was incomparable to publishing writers hitherto unknown to the public. Over the years, the Series' editors understood too well that its development depended on recruiting new authors, the value of whom would become an asset to the Series. The first of these writers was Ngugi. Not only did he bring new element to the series that can be described in terms of its content, but also brought the whole East Africa to the attention of HEB. His first novel to appear in the Series, *Weep Not, Child*, became the 'first' novel to come out of the region, bringing forth a narrative that had not been explored by the first generation of African writers, a narrative of decolonisation and the process by which Kenyan peasants and working class achieved political independence. The publication of *Weep Not, Child* paved the way for the publication of Ngugi's other works, and initiated an enduring relationship with HEB that lasted for four decades.

If the AWS was generally identified as a reprint Series in its early years with occasional publication of new titles, the appointment of Currey in 1967 to take on the responsibility of managing the Series marked a gradual move into publishing new titles and authors. His coming into the scene coincided with HEB's plans for expanding its business across the African continent where the establishment of new branch in Nairobi signalled a belated interest in the East African market. The success of Ngugi was inducing HEB to look for new prospective writers. Until then, HEB's concentration had been on the West African market. Perhaps the return of Ngugi to Nairobi was also perceived positive for he would be able to play a similar role to the one Achebe was assuming in Nigeria. As a result, new writers from the region were soon to appear in the Series: Peter Palangyo's *Dying in the Sun* was the first Tanzanian novel in English when published in the Series as No 53 in 1969; Robert Serumaga's *Return to the Shadows* which was published in 1969; and Taban Lo Liyong's *Fixions* was brought out in the same year. In persuading HEB's



editors to publish Liyong, Ngugi wrote to Currey: “Taban lo Liyong is a tough nut to crack and one must, I think, be on one’s guard, must indeed be in the right mood, when reading him, else it would be easy to dismiss him as a tedious eccentric.”<sup>26</sup>

Currey’s appointment came also at a time when two factors were affecting the growth of the Series. The first was negative. Achebe’s involvement in the Nigerian civil-war left him little time if any to dedicate to the AWS. The second was positive. The steady flow of manuscripts into HEB’s offices in London and Ibadan required an able editor who would supervise the Series’ daily management. Publishing a diversity of these manuscripts in terms of genre, subject matter and regions they come from is perhaps what makes Currey’s tenure the most productive in the life of Series. His wide network of writers, translators and editors helped him to successfully introduce new writings into the series. Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North*, Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and Nuruddin Farah’s *From a Crooked Rib* among many others are some of the titles that were produced early in his career. By 1972, when Achebe relinquished the editorship of the Series, a hundred titles had appeared under the imprint of the Series. The rise in the number of books published between 1968 and 1972 must be attributed to the input of Currey, who after joining HEB in February 1967, set out to expand the list in another dimension, namely bringing important South African connections to the Series. Thanks to him authors like Dennis Brutus and Bessie Head were added to the list.

Once Achebe gave up his editorial position, Currey developed a complex, perhaps a better system whereby new manuscripts would get assessed and approved. He relied on the input of the HEB branches in both Nigeria and Kenya. This policy allowed Higo and the newly recruited Chakava to be more active in the decision of who, what, when and how to publish the Series’ titles.

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<sup>26</sup> Ngugi, Nairobi, Currey, London, (undated) HEB 20/8, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

All shortlisted manuscripts were to be circulated among all three companies. Enthusiastic support by any vote was not necessary. No company had the veto. There was nearly always unanimity on the novels. Poetry, being so much a matter of personal taste, produced widely different opinions. Nobody agreed about plays...<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps sharing these decisions is what makes the 1970s a very successful decade for both HEB and publishing of the African literature. The number of manuscripts reached an impressive level. These developments were made possible by the growth of African economies, particularly in Nigeria, where the main market of the Series was. By 1982, the Nigerian foreign exchange closed. Its closure underlined what had become an increasing problem throughout West and East Africa. There was no foreign exchange left to pay the bills for all the imported books. The devaluation of the dollar throughout the 1980s contributed greatly to the financial crisis of many African countries. After the short-lived oil-boom of the 1970s, economic recession slowly brought with it a depressing atmosphere to many spheres in Nigerian life. The book sector was deeply affected as the market for imports collapsed. HEB which was relying on the Nigerian market soon suffered its turn and between 1982 and 1987, HEB had four owners. Such a discouraging publishing scene brought about some drastic changes to the publishing of the AWS as it was considerably reduced in numbers. Pressure from the new owners to increase profitability dictated a policy of putting a large number of books out of print and the publication of as few new titles as possible. HEB, in Currey's words, "wanted only to keep a toe in Africa". Having been deeply involved in the development of the AWS since 1967, Currey, once hailed as the "godfather of African publishing," as a result left to set up his own publishing firm.

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<sup>27</sup> Vicky Unwin and Currey, "The African Writers Series Celebrates 30 Years," *Southern African Review of Books*, (March/April 1993), pp. 5-6.

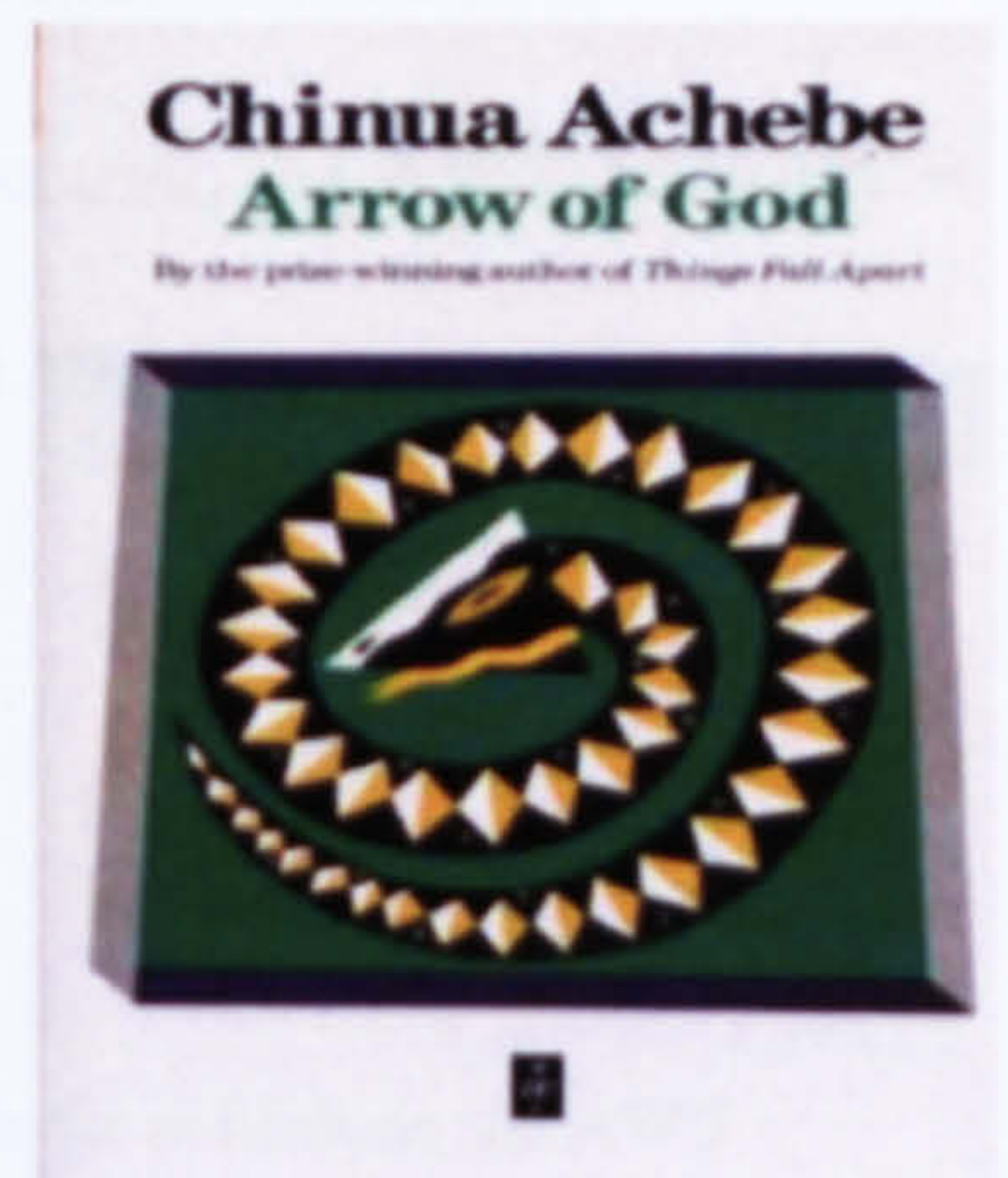
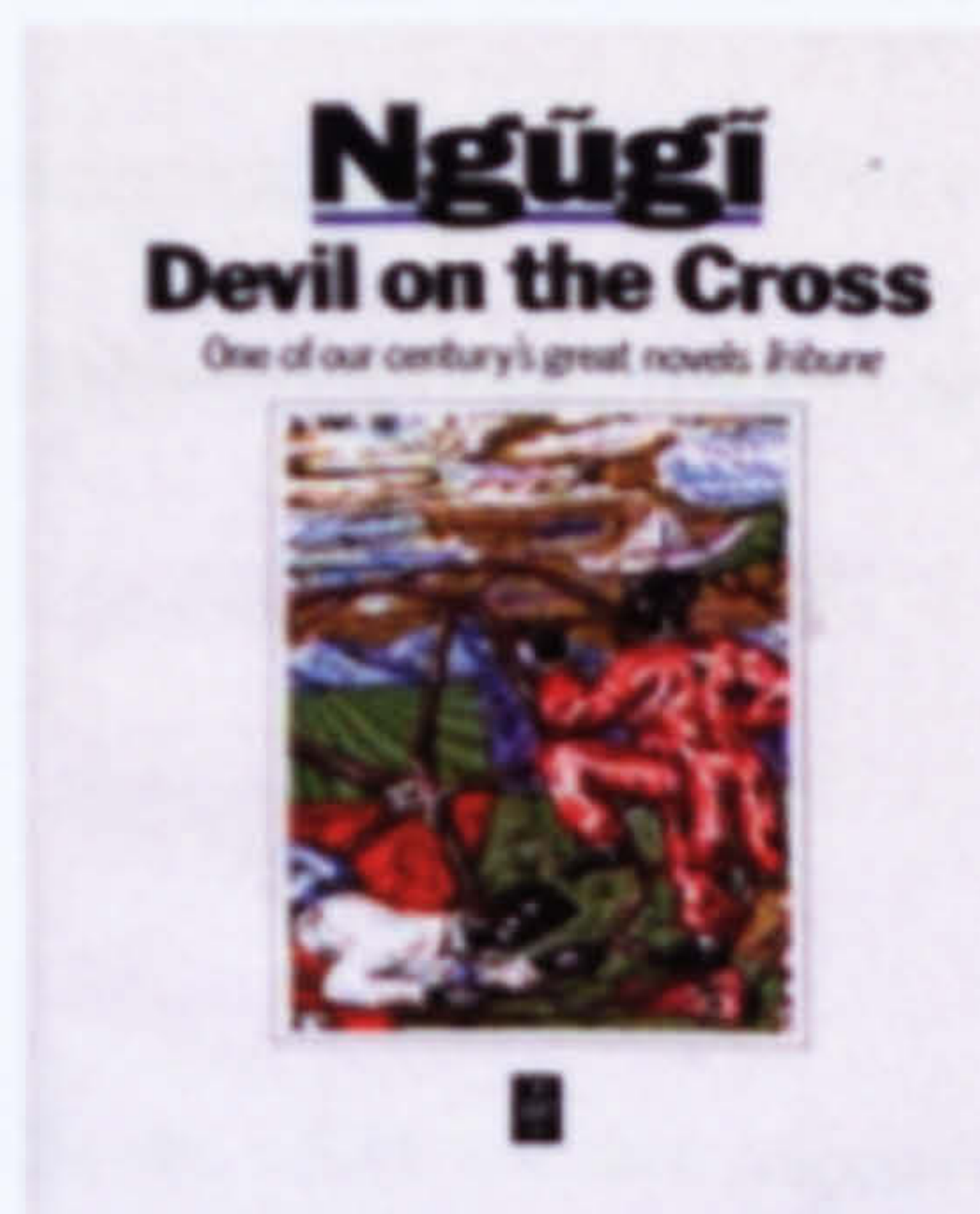
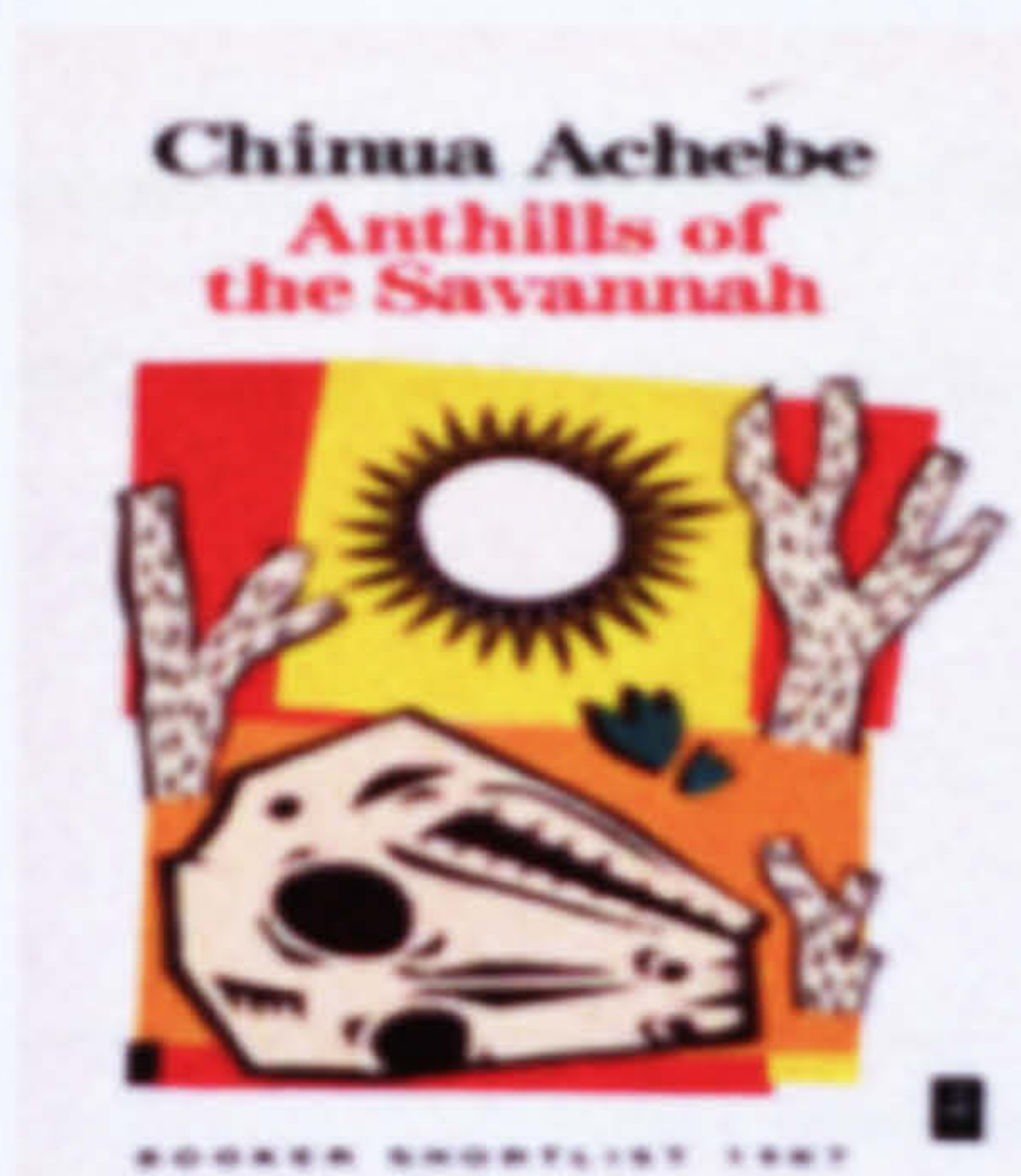


In 1986 Vicky Unwin relaunched the AWS using the B format so that it would appeal to trade markets. The relaunch attempted to target new readership and warrant the financial feasibility of the Series. The Series had relied throughout its first two decades on the African educational market, where African governments were the main customers and books were guaranteed a profit. With the increasing problems of the African economies in the early 1980's, the educational market that had been supported through government funds suffered a great deal, as Unwin explained:

The recession in Africa meant that ordinary people – our readers – could no longer afford to purchase the books; this went for governments as well. In the past we had supplied orders by the thousand to Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya and others, but they stopped coming. The market we were left with was a small but faithful Western academic market, with occasional prescriptions to African countries when they had money.<sup>28</sup>

This move toward “Western academic market” was reflected in the choice of a new design of which the most salient aspect was the disappearance of the orange colour. While the style reflected a clear shift towards a more contemporary, abstract look, the cover image, normally boxed and centred on the white background, emphasised content relating to the theme of the book rather than former arty images spread over the covers.

Samples of the design used by Vicky Unwin after 1986



<sup>28</sup> Unwin and Currey, "The African Writers Series celebrates 30 years", p.3.



Not only was this new packaging made to give the Series a new look, but also encourage Heinemann International Literature and Textbooks<sup>29</sup> (henceforth Heinemann ILT) to try to establish a market presence and compete with Picador and Penguin's B formats. Above all, the new design came out as an essential attempt to target new markets outside Africa and revive the Series which had suffered a great deal after 1982.

In an attempt to promote the Series, Adewale Maja-Pearce, the then AWS' consultant, encouraged Heinemann ILT to concentrate on the educational market, stressing the need to compete as a specialist in African area. He endorsed various recommendations: publishing titles which had the potential of becoming set texts, reducing the number of first novels unless felt absolutely excellent and deserving, creating and establishing links with literature departments, and getting external advice on the publishing policies of the AWS from academics.<sup>30</sup> While these suggestions indicated a new management and marketing approach, they also reflected current problems facing the Series.

In 1988, Heinemann ILT published two new books; one of them was by Achebe, *Anthills of the Savannah*. This had been the lowest number of titles published in a single year since the launch of the series in 1962.<sup>31</sup> The future of the Series seemed uncertain and drastic measures were envisaged. Unwin came to the defence. Not only was the Series the flagship of Heinemann International overseas, its fame was also a great asset in getting books by Heinemann International prescribed in Africa. Moreover, the Series was a major contributor to the turnover of Heinemann International. For example, the AWS' turnover in 1987 was £541K, almost 50% of Heinemann ILT turnover and 59.9% of its profits. In

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<sup>29</sup> A division of Heinemann Educational Books, which was then responsible for publishing the AWS.

<sup>30</sup> Memo by Adewale Maja-Pearce, (Undated), HEB 56/2, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>31</sup> See Appendix 3.



Group terms, the Series was also a key contributor to the Heinemann companies overseas as was the case of Heinemann Inc whose AWS' turnover in 1987 was \$521K.<sup>32</sup>

According to statistics, South Africa and the neighbouring countries continued to form by the late 1980s an important market of the AWS. As a result of increased aid funding, the South African market was starting to compete with other African markets like East Africa, Ghana and Cameroon. For Unwin, the need to answer the changing and often unpredicted demands of the educational authorities in these countries meant that Heinemann ILT had to keep as many titles available as possible. Aid orders to Africa could make it the largest market for the Series, but, according to Unwin, it would remain a backlist market. North America, therefore, was the key influence in their choice of future publishing. Positive signs that North America was becoming a potential market for the AWS were recognised; a market which was fast growing involved mainly university and college communities.

When in 1991 Robert Sulley became Publishing Manager of Heinemann ILT, the first step he took to give impetus to the Series was to consult with colleagues in the American branch of Heinemann about the Series' publishing programme and strategy. His plan was to publish twice a year in "waves" of five titles,<sup>33</sup> which was favourably received by his associates in the United States as it enabled Heinemann Inc., to time their publicity dates and get the bulk of new books in one shipment. As to quantity, ten titles a year were deemed sufficient whereas fewer titles would diminish the presence of the series in the Heinemann Inc's list.<sup>34</sup>

In 1992, hoping to restructure the management system of Heinemann ILT, Sulley engaged Caroline Avens in the AWS. Beside her existing job as Rights and Marketing Manger, Avens was hired to look after all new books published in the Series and the

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<sup>32</sup> Unwin, Memo, 21 November 1988, HEB 56/2 SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Sulley, London, to John Watson, New York, 1 August 1991, HEB 56/2, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>34</sup> Tom Seavey, memo, to Sulley, 1 August 1991, HEB 56/2, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

backlist, as well as specific African Studies titles. The fall of the Series' sales from £551,700 in 1990 to £524,700 in 1991<sup>35</sup> had already caused considerable anxiety and induced the newly appointed Avens to adopt a new publishing strategy. In particular her plan was to recruit new authors whose reputation was growing in academic circles, reduce the backlist titles, and cut down the number of first novels and novels by dead authors unless they already had good reputations such as Bessie Head. She also specified the need to provide academic back-up for AWS' authors by publishing selections of essays and improving links with general literature and African literature departments.

As Marketing Manager, Avens also redesigned the Series' cover. Such a decision came as a result of a serious failure to effectively market the Series. Between 1988 and 1991 the AWS was struggling to keep up its place in the UK market. This was put down to a number of factors: Poor marketing, downturn in the UK market, recession and the failure of many independent bookshops. Most UK publishers saw their sales drop in 1990. Paperback fiction sales fell by 4.4% and hardback by 36%.<sup>36</sup> Many of the small bookshops that had been set up in the early 1980's went bankrupt at the beginning of the 1990's. The closure of Third World Publications, the specialist wholesaler, which promoted the AWS in the UK, for example, went down owing Heinemann £12,000.<sup>37</sup> The Africa Book Centre, which took over the role of Third World Publications, targeted only independent bookshops, which were being cautious about their orders of AWS' titles. Added to this was the failure to take advantage of the progress made by up-market chains like Dillons and Waterstones and effectively market the Series to these organisations meant an increasing marginalisation of the Series. Other marketing problems surfaced. Heinemann's publishing strategy failed to take into account the suitability of the Series' titles for academic study, sometimes publishing too many first novels or books by authors who were already dead

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<sup>35</sup> Sulley, Memo, to Unwin, 11 February 1992, HEB 44/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

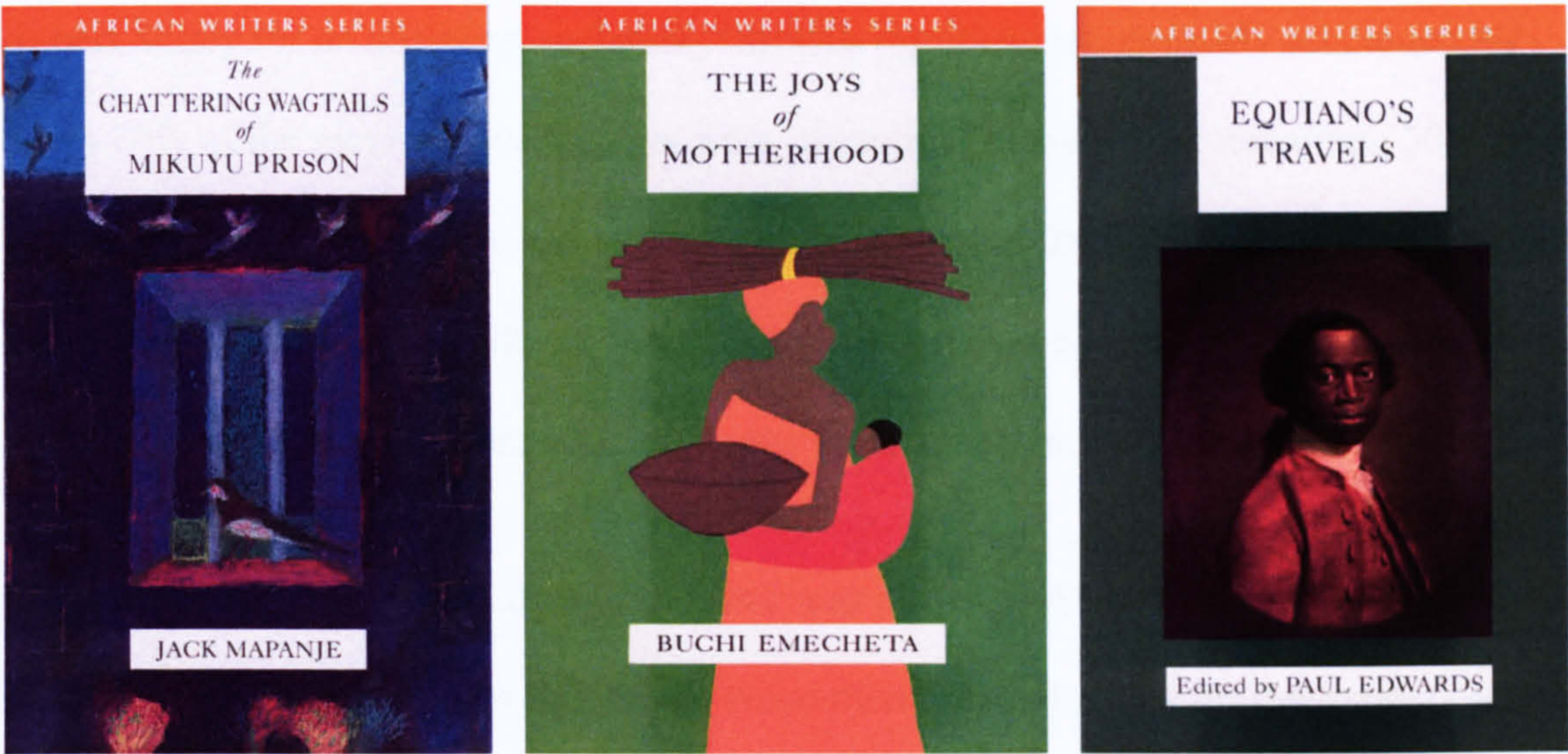
<sup>36</sup> Caroline Avens to Unwin, Sulley, Maja-Pearce, Watson, 4 June 1992, HEB 56/2, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.



and had not enjoyed strong market presence while still alive. Other times books were published without a clearly defined readership.

Samples of the design adopted by Caroline Avens in 1993



The packaging was another problem. Avens felt that the Series should not look like a reproduction of Minerva, Picador and Penguin, but feature as a distinctive paperback series with separate style standing out from other B formats. Moreover, she felt the Series should make a good use of established names such as Achebe and Ngugi which in turn made “the series’ name [...] legendary”. Conversely, Avens adds,

It is this that we are in danger of diluting. We are not going to be successful publishing new unknown writers if they are introduced as individuals, they must carry the Series weight with them. The series is a marketing tool and must always be seen as more important than its individual components...As an African specialist publisher we have no competition, as mainstream international fiction publishers we fade into obscurity. We are also against even more competition than before as old established trade imprints turn to paperback originals to boost their flagging sales.<sup>38</sup>

In 1993, Maja-Pearce was made AWS’ General Editor. His role was to evaluate manuscripts received for the Series, search for new writers and novels, hold regular

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.



meetings with the publisher to discuss the Series' progress, and attend conferences and seminars to help promote the Series in academic circles. When he stopped carrying out this role a year later, Heinemann ILT tried to devise a slightly different way of working. Becky Clarke, the Commissioning Editor, acknowledged manuscripts and forwarded them to Robert Sulley for an initial appreciation. Obvious rejects which normally accounted for about 70% of the received manuscripts were instantly discarded. The remaining 30% were sent to reviewers. Once these arrived, the promising manuscripts were sent to Heinemann Inc. in the USA for their feedback since they were the main market. A final decision about publishing was made by Heinemann ILT after Heinemann Inc delivered their verdict.<sup>39</sup>

Still the need to appoint an Editorial Advisor was pressing. Abdulrazak Gurnah was invited in 1994 to advise Heinemann ILT on the broad direction and policy for the Series.<sup>40</sup> In the two consecutive years he performed such a role, Gurnah tried to influence the Series' direction by recommending the inclusion of North African writers such as Assia Djebbar and Taher Ben Jelloun.<sup>41</sup> He also tried to convince Heinemann ILT to republish successful trilogies by various African authors such as Achebe, Ngugi and Bessie Head and market them in a new packaging by adding introductions and notes to suit new readerships.

Despite the short association he had with the Series, Gurnah's contributions were significant. His departure made a considerable impact on the series, for fewer titles were published in the following years. Heinemann ILT had to succumb to the reality that the markets available to the Series – Britain, South Africa and USA – were mainly for the first generation of African writers who were published in the 1960's and to a lesser extent those of the 1970s and the 1980s. The struggle of Heinemann's staff to promote the series by

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<sup>39</sup> Sulley, memo/e-mail, "Unsolicited AWS/CWS manuscripts," to Tilly Warren-Green, Nicky Gibbons, Becky Clarke and Ruth Hamilton-Jones, 16 November 1994, 12:48. See also Letter from Robert Sulley to Abdulrazak Gurnah, 14 December 1994, HEB 52/2, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Although Gurnah's recommendation were initially discussed and accepted, they failed to appear in the AWS.



engaging in various cultural events came as a last resort to overcome their difficulties.

There were also attempts to refresh older links with former associates in East Africa as a way of “welding together the publishing and family-hood between Heinemann and East African Educational Publishers – which was strained between 1985 and 1995.”<sup>42</sup>

Nevertheless, the Series was already in the process of decline. In examining the archives of the AWS, one cannot fail to notice a disparity between the way the series was run during its first two decades and that of the 1990s. Besides the fact that there were too many discrepant visions and approaches of directing the Series, Heinemann ILT lacked a cohesive and strong management. Added to this was the growing rivalry between Heinemann ILT in UK and Heinemann Inc. in USA. The latter, as the main customer and market, exercised considerable control over the publishing programme and strategy of the former. In England, there was a feeling of the need to resist being stripped out of the management of AWS, almost a ‘national’ British brand. Avens put it bluntly when she stated that “By all ‘business’ definitions, AWS is a ‘cash Cow’, and all accepted business wisdom says that we should milk it, not give it to someone else!”<sup>43</sup>

In the fortieth anniversary of the AWS in 2002, Ngugi noted that “African writing is the nearest thing we have to a pan-African common heritage and this, in no small measure, is due to the African Writers Series.... May the series live and continue to multiply.”<sup>44</sup> Ngugi’s wish unfortunately did not come true. Not only his new manuscript, *Wizard of the Crow*, was rejected by Heinemann ILT,<sup>45</sup> but a year later the publishers of the Heinemann imprint, Harcourt Heinemann, decided to discontinue the AWS. Nigel Kelly, the publishing director of the international division of the Harcourt Education Ltd.

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<sup>42</sup> Onyango Ogutu, Nairobi, to Julian Russ, Oxford, 15 September 1995, HEB 5/6, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>43</sup> Avens, email/memo, “AWS and the USA”, to Natalie Warren-Green and Robert Sulley, 24 August 1995, 11:47, HEB 52/2, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>44</sup> Ngugi, quoted in Becky Clarke, “The African Writers Series – Celebrating Forty Years of publishing Distinction,” *Research in African Literatures* 34, N 2 (2003): p.172.

<sup>45</sup> Clarke, “Interview,” *African Writing* No 2, (October/November 2007), <http://www.african-writing.com/ayebia.htm>

explained that their decision to stop publishing new titles was due to the fact that their recent ones had not sold as they hoped and so they decided not to pursue new titles and to focus their attention on promoting the backlist titles. Such a plan, he maintained, would benefit their existing authors by giving the titles already published more impetus. However, the acquisition of Heinemann International Publishers by the US-based Harcourt Educational Books, and the subsequent restructuring of the company, has put an end to the series. Heinemann International closed with a loss of thirty jobs, including that of its Managing Director, Robert Sulley. Harcourt still distribute 64 of their bestselling titles out of 359 titles published since 1962. Their decision, some commentators noted, was to do with the fact that Harcourt publishes print and online educational materials for primary and secondary schools, which did not seem to match the policy of commissioning serious literature from Africa. At all events, the decision of Harcourt gave an end to a remarkable tradition in the publishing history of world literature.



## Chapter Three

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### *‘Wherever Something Stands, Something Else Will Stand Beside It’: Chinua Achebe and Heinemann*

I had always assumed that the Commonwealth of Nations was a great bonus for a writer, that the English-speaking Union was a desirable fraternity. But talking with A. D. Hope that evening, I felt somewhat like an *illegitimate child* face to face with the true son of the house lamenting the excesses of an adventurous and profligate father who had kept a mistress in every port.<sup>1</sup>

#### -I-

The ‘feeling’ of being an ‘illegitimate child’ that Achebe evokes in the passage above is suggestive. It refers to the traumatic questioning of identity that most African writers experienced following the collapse of European colonial ventures in Africa and the rise of nationalistic movements. Achebe is a key figure in the ‘new’ emerged group of African writers who have engaged in serious and impassioned dialogues about establishing definitions of African identity, culture, literature and traditions. These dialogues continue to inform much of the current academic agendas within the African world and beyond.

From the epigraph, two more important ideas emerge: the first is that Achebe considers himself as part of the large Commonwealth ‘family’; the second is that his identity as an “African writer” is a by-product of colonialism itself. Achebe’s literary debut bears witness to these hybrid ties, as when he first sent his manuscript to London seeking to be adopted by a British publisher. The publisher happened to be Hill, the managing director of William Heinemann’s educational department. This was to be the ‘house’ with which Achebe was going to be associated before the two relocated themselves to a new company called HEB while retaining strong ties with the former establishment. Did Achebe aim through this affiliation to acquire a sense of ‘legitimacy’? It is true that HEB bestowed on

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<sup>1</sup> Achebe, *Hopes and impediments: Selected Essays 1965-1987* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1988), p. 50. Italics added.

Achebe both prestige and power when it offered him the post of General Advisor of the AWS. This was also the Series in which he published several of his books during its four decades. In return, Achebe established the Series' reputation at the international level, while editing and advising on an impressive list that included all literary genres from such parts of the world often regarded by Europeans as culturally backward and intellectually barren.

Beside his writing and publishing activities, Achebe represents an important species of African intellectuals. First, he belongs to a generation of writers who grew during the colonial period and came of age during the decolonization process, and thus has conveyed a broader vision of Nigeria's transformation over these critical phases. Second, as Emmanuel Ngara affirms, Achebe's name "is synonymous with the rise and development of modern African literature because [he] is a pace-setter."<sup>2</sup> Finally, the canonical status attained by his works, particularly *Things Fall Apart*, has rendered any discussion of the development of African literature in English without invoking his contributions rather unthinkable.

While these factors seem to justify the current burst of academic interest in Achebe, several intriguing questions remain unexplained. Why has Achebe's name acquired such glamour and become "synonymous" with the evolution of African literature? Why has Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) received so much attention when other texts such as Sol Plaatje's *Mhudi* (written in 1917 and published in 1930), Amos Tutuola's *The Palm Wine Drinkard* (1952) or even Ekwensi's *People of the City* (1954) have won far less recognition? What particularly determines the literary value attached to these works? Had Achebe written 'exotic' *Tutuolan* folktales in the same plain English style that characterises his novels, would he have won the same acclaim? As Nahem Yousaf points out in a recent study,

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<sup>2</sup> Emmanuel Ngara, "Achebe as Artist: the Place and Significance of *Anthills of the Savannah*", in Peterson and Rutherford, eds., *Chinua Achebe: A Celebration* (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Books, 1990), pp. 113-129.



Achebe's distinctive popularity rests on his successful interpenetrating of Igbo folktales and proverbs with allusions to Western literary traditions that educated audiences enjoy. Stylistically, his fusion of forms of literary realism with what he calls 'English in character', moulded to 'carry the weight of [his] African experience', energised African and Western readers and encouraged critics to revisit the English language to see the 'untold things' that Achebe could do with it.<sup>3</sup>

Engaging his African experience through an efficient use of European aesthetic forms of expression is indeed a salient quality in Achebe's writing. He may have been one of the early African literary figures to invest his aesthetic sensibility in his creative writings, but this combination of folktales with art forms define the work of almost every other African writer. Simon Gikandi, in this respect, objects to the construction of Achebe's prominence on the basis of his "pioneering status in the African tradition." The emphasis, he suggests, should instead be placed on situating his writing and thought "in their proper perspective and in relation to some important literary precursors and within the nationalist tradition that produced him."<sup>4</sup> Gikandi further argues that Achebe's outstanding position in the history of African literature lies specifically in his ability to have realised – at the critical moment of transition from colonialism to national independence – that the novel was "not solely [...] a mode of representing reality, but one which had limitless possibilities of inventing a new national community."<sup>5</sup>

Gareth Griffiths suggests that the image of Achebe, as "typically a university graduate, a 'been to' who had travelled overseas, and a member of the relatively well-off post-Independence elite employed by the government service" helped "his breakthrough into overseas publication."<sup>6</sup> While Griffiths' argument is made in the context of a

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<sup>3</sup> Nahem Yousaf, *Chinua Achebe* (Devon: Northcote House, 2003), p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Simon Gikandi, *Reading Chinua Achebe: Language and Ideology in Fiction* (Heinemann and James Currey: Portsmouth and London, 1991), p.2.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>6</sup> Griffiths, *A Double Exile: African and West Indian Writing Between Two Cultures* (London: Marion Boyars, 1978), p. 12.

comparison with Tutuola, it conveys a much broader vision of the background which many of Achebe's contemporaries share.<sup>7</sup> In his memoir Hill notes that "Achebe was not an isolated phenomenon. He was the product of the newly-established University of Ibadan which was creating new intellectual dimension in the life of West Africa."<sup>8</sup> He further asserts that "there must be other writers *comparable* to Achebe, awaiting a publisher with the confidence and resources to launch them on a world-wide market."<sup>9</sup>

Although Griffiths' appears to place much emphasis on the singularity of Achebe's achievements, it has to be remembered that a combination of extraordinary circumstances enabled Achebe and a number of his fellow writers to become known at home and abroad. In particular, thanks to the efforts of British publishers, a number of originally unknown creative texts were disseminated and turned into bestsellers and acclaimed works. The appearance of *Things Fall Apart*, for instance, reflects a sensitive post-colonial moment which has never ceased to draw attention from critics and historians. The particularity of this moment informs much of the narrative of the novel. It is a narrative defined by discourses of colonialism, decolonisation, and nationalism. Gikandi attributes Achebe's distinctive contribution to the invention of "a new African narrative" that could "write against, and decentre, [the] colonial discourse as a prelude to evoking an alternative space of representation."<sup>10</sup> Gikandi also claims that "Achebe's attempt to recover the integrity of African culture" is carried not so much through reproducing the African reality, but rather through negotiating "how Africa has been represented in European colonial discourse."<sup>11</sup> For this reason, Gikandi insists that Achebe "was possibly the *first* African writer to be

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<sup>7</sup> John Munonye graduated with a BA in Latin, Greek and history in 1952 and spent a year doing a Post-graduate course in Education at London University before returning in 1954 to Nigeria to work for the Ministry of Education as a senior Inspector of Education. Lenrie Peters was born to a well-off family, studied Latin and physics at the Cambridge Technical College, and later natural sciences at Trinity College, Cambridge. Wole Soyinka was educated in universities of Ibadan (1952-54) and Leeds (1956-60) before returning to Nigeria to join the University of Ibadan as a Rockefeller Research Fellow in Drama.

<sup>8</sup> Hill, *In Pursuit of Publishing* (London: John Murray, 1988), p. 122.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>10</sup> Gikandi, *Reading Chinua Achebe*, p.6.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p.10.



self-conscious about his role as an African writer, to confront the linguistic and historical problems of African writing in a colonial situation, and to situate writing within a larger body of regional and global knowledge about Africa.”<sup>12</sup> Gikandi’s assertion apparently stems from another affirmative statement that “the act of restoring the African self to history *is itself* dependent on Western language, Western institutions, and Western intellectual categories.”<sup>13</sup> And while Gikandi questions the way African literature can genuinely “develop under Western forms of domination that have continued even after political independence,”<sup>14</sup> he does not indicate what he means by these ‘institutions’ and ‘intellectual categories’. Least of all, there is no acknowledgement of the role that publishing ‘institutions’ played in the dissemination of Achebe’s work worldwide.

The following chapter offers an account of the role played by publishing companies in the metropolis in the production and dissemination of African literature. It was thanks to this evolving connection between British publishers and African writers in the late 1950s that the emergence of a foundational text like *Things Fall Apart* was made possible. This possibility, I argue, provides an unprecedented chance for both publisher and writer to use and promote a discourse that each from his position wanted to disseminate.

Such a discourse is by no means limited to the African context. “The winds of change” that swept over the African continent in the late fifties and early sixties reflected larger political transformations across Europe and many parts of the colonized world, especially after World War Two.<sup>15</sup> A relevant illustration of how Europeans produced their own anti-colonial narrative is that influential European intellectuals were aware that among the effects of decolonisation, particularly in Africa, was the questioning of the values of European culture. Sartre, one of the most progressive intellectual of his time observes that

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 5-6. Italics added

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.10. Italics added

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> The use of the WWII as a historical point of reference here emanates from an understanding that Africans themselves were involved, unwittingly, in this War. In fact the African soil was in many instances its platform.

we in Europe too are being decolonised: that is to say that the settler which is in every one of us is being savagely rooted out. Let us look at ourselves, if we can bear to, and see what is becoming of us. First, we must face that unexpected revelation, the striptease of our humanism. There you can see it, quite naked, and it's not a pretty sight. It was nothing but an ideology of lies, a perfect justification for pillage; its honeyed words, its affectation of sensibility were only alibis for our aggression.<sup>16</sup>

The virtue of *Things Fall Apart* lies in its ability to visualize and articulate a different narrative of the complex colonial moment. Now because of its inclusion of the European 'Other', this African narrative caught the attention of the British publisher, critic, and reader. It was thanks to the engagement of academic institutions and scholars that Achebe's text came into the limelight. Despite its apparent simple style and plot, *Things Fall Apart* gained momentum because of its rich and original exploration of the colonial theme. Unlike Gikandi who attaches little significance to Achebe's "pioneering status in the African tradition," I argue that this sense of precedence has become a reference point for critics, teachers and students. Such a reference point has proved too important to ignore because the novel has now been '*legitimised*' and 'institutionalised' as the 'first' important literary work that came out of Africa. Griffiths is right in noting that

from its publication we can date *European* awareness that the new literature from Africa will be the record and product of an old and deeply articulate culture too long silenced by European cultural projection during the colonial period. From this point too we can date the creation of a general impulse to record the realities of tribal life lost behind the innumerable accounts of African 'primitive customs'. Young African writers took up the challenge, and Achebe's novel was followed by a spate of imitations. For this reason many critics have felt that the publication of Achebe's novel in 1958 represents the real point at which African writing in English became a force which could not be ignored in the world at large.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, Preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*, by Frantz Fanon (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967), p.21.

<sup>17</sup> Griffiths, *A Double Exile*, p. 13. (Italics added).



Nonetheless, the study of Achebe's career remains incomplete without full attention and credit being paid to the intricate publishing process his works have gone through. This chapter attempts to address this conspicuous omission in the historiography of African literature. Using Achebe's records and correspondence, it offers a careful examination of the editorial process *Things Fall Apart*, *Girls at War*, *Beware Soul Brother* and *Anthills of the Savannah* took from early drafts to final manuscripts ready for publication by Heinemann.

## -II-

Several years before William Heinemann published *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe's attempts at creative writing were channelled through the only available outlet, *The University Herald*, a campus publication issued by the students' union. Through the *Herald*, Achebe published 'Polar Undergraduate' (1950)<sup>18</sup>, 'In a Village Church' (1951), 'The Old Order in Conflict with the New' (1952)<sup>19</sup>, and 'Dead Men's Path' (1953).<sup>20</sup> The core themes of these short pieces, which were later fully explored in *Things Fall Apart* and the two subsequent novels, revolve around the experience of three generations of Ibo people. The main stages of this narrative involve Okwonkwo whose life commences before the advent of colonialism, his son who is converted to Christianity and acquires some Western education, and the grandson living on the threshold of independence. By the end of March 1956 the book project which carried the provisional title *Things Fall Apart* was completed. When he moved to London where he spent the following five months attending

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<sup>18</sup> Bernth Lindfors referred to this as the first contribution to the *University Herald*. This was a humorous sketch which was later reprinted in *Girls at War and other stories*. See Lindfors, *Early Nigerian Literature* (New York; London: Africana Publishing Company, 1982), pp.91-106.

<sup>19</sup> 'The Old Order in Conflict with the New' was Achebe's first short story in the *University Herald* appeared in May 1952. This was reprinted as "Beginning of the End" in *The Sacrificial Egg and Other Short Stories* (1962), and was given yet another title, "Marriage is a private Affair", when revised and reissued in *Girls at War and Other Stories*.

<sup>20</sup> 'Dead Men's Path' was rather a title given to the story in 1971. It was untitled when first published in *University Herald*.

the BBC Staff School for a general Radio Production course, Achebe brought with him what he presumed was his most valuable personal possession, the manuscript.<sup>21</sup>

At the BBC staff school, he timidly approached one of his tutors, Gilbert Phelps who was a novelist in his own right, to “look at something [he had] done.” Phelps’s feedback was more than positive. He wanted to show the manuscript at once to his editor and publishers. Despite this favourable reaction, the young writer was reluctant to part with his manuscript in its current condition. Perhaps he feared a negative feedback and “wanted to make some corrections, especially the latter part which was [to become] *No Longer at Ease*. It was actually two novels in one.”<sup>22</sup>

Back in Nigeria, Achebe steadily worked on his manuscript leaving only the story of Okwonkwo, adding new paragraphs and chapters and on the whole turning it into what seemed a sizeable novel. Once he completed the revision early in 1957, Achebe decided to take a step ahead and send his manuscript to a typing agency in London. In their acknowledgment letter the typing agency requested a fee of £22, which Achebe sent by British postal order. After receiving no reply to his constant queries, Achebe sought the help of Angela Beattie, his boss at the Nigerian Broadcasting Service. Knowing she was going to London for her annual leave, Achebe asked her to inquire about the fate of his manuscript. Her intervention brought about a successful end to Achebe’s anxiety as the manuscript was eventually typed and sent back to Achebe at the end of 1957. This story has been told many times, but one may find it a bit farcical for an aspiring African writer to send his single manuscript from Lagos to London in order to be typed.

As was expected, Achebe sent the typed manuscript to Phelps who forwarded it to his editor at William Heinemann, James Michie.<sup>23</sup> The publisher’s reader, Moira Lynd,

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<sup>21</sup> In early 1956 Achebe was nominated by NBS, Lagos to attend the BBC Staff School in London. Achebe was scheduled to attend a general Radio Production course for overseas broadcasters from 3 April to 11 May, to be followed by attachment to a BBC department from 12 May to 31 August.

<sup>22</sup> Ezenwa-Ohaeto, *Chinua Achebe: A Biography* (Oxford: James Currey, 1997), p. 62.

<sup>23</sup> There are various tales of how the manuscript reached William Heinemann office. Achebe’s biographer says that Achebe sent the manuscript to Phelps’ agent who presented it to various London publishers before



produced one typed page report describing the novel as “a very exciting discovery: a well-written novel about the break-up of tribal life in one part of Nigeria. It is full of characters who really live, and, once begun, it is difficult to put down. It is *the first novel*, I think, on this fascinating theme.”<sup>24</sup> At the bottom of the page, an additional hand-written paragraph reached the conclusion that the writing “is simple and extremely effective. There is a shortage of commas and a few tiny slips....But in general it is the best sort of plain English. Likeable, exciting, new. Strongly recommend.”<sup>25</sup>

Although the report was in favour of publishing Achebe’s novel, the decision-makers at William Heinemann were uncertain. William Heinemann’s directors and editors must have wondered who would want to buy a novel by an obscure African writer.<sup>26</sup> Their thoughts were centred on a domestic British readership and overlooked the option of Anglophone Africa as a potential, ready-made market. Hill and his Educational Department came on to the scene to make a final decision. Their educational advisor, Professor Donald MacRae, ended the debate with a twelve word sentence: “This is the best first novel I have read since the war”.<sup>27</sup>

*Things Fall Apart* was published in hardback on 17 June 1958 with a print run of 2,000 copies. It elicited favourable reviews, which, as Anthony Curtis suggests, were “the greatest service in alerting the reading public to the emergence of a fresh creative talent or the maturing of an existing talent.”<sup>28</sup> Most of the reviews in the period following the publication seemed to centre their assessment of the novel on three points: (1) its being the

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he gave it to David Michie. The story does not fit with what Hill and Currey wrote about the incident. It certainly does not fit with Achebe’s earlier story of how he had promised Phelps to send him the manuscript so that he could present it to his editor and publishers. It seems to me that Achebe as a young man would not risk sending his manuscript to an agent. He possibly did not know who this agent was, but surely he knew Phelps.

<sup>24</sup> Gilbert Phelps, Reader’s Report on *Things Fall Apart*, quoted in Currey, “Africa Writes Back” (manuscript), p. 43.

<sup>25</sup> See St John, *William Heinemann: A Century of Publishing, 1890-1990*, p. 518.

<sup>26</sup> Peterson and Rutherford eds. *Chinua Achebe: A Celebration*, p.110.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Anthony Curtis, *Lit Ed: On Reviewing and Reviewers* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1998), p.p.15.

‘first’ influential African novel in English; (2) its objectivity; and (3) its unique style and language use.

Reviewing *Things Fall Apart* three days before the novel’s formal publication date, Peggy Appiah made a prophecy that “the name of Chinua Achebe will probably go down in the history of West African literature as that of *its first straight* novelist” since his book “is ...an excellent novel by any standard.”<sup>29</sup> Perhaps Appiah’s premature review left it for others to explain how “straight” Achebe was. Mercedes Mackay, for instance, seemed relieved that “at last a Nigerian writer has appeared who can give us a *straightforward*, penetrating and absolutely honest picture of African village life before the advent of the first missionaries.” For her *Things Fall Apart* was a powerful novel which “[*broke*] new ground in Nigerian fiction.” Her claim was justified with a good argument: European novels about West Africa were “superficially humorous, or grimly serious.” As a reader, she was clearly “tired of jokes about the sly, stupid servants and the goat being hauled on the overloaded lorry, or the “civilised” African, full of long words, who ends up grovelling in Witch Doctor’s hut.” African writers such as Cyprian Ekwensi, on the contrary, had given readers “excellent realism about modern Lagos scene” while Amos Tutuola “specialised and extremely interesting fantasy.”<sup>30</sup>

Tutuola’s *The Palm Wine Drinkard*, which was the ‘first’ West African novel in English to achieve some international recognition, was often regarded as a ‘primitive’ text.<sup>31</sup> Anthony West, a critic for the *New Yorker*, notes that in reading it, “one catches a glimpse of the very beginning of literature, that moment when writing at last seizes and pins down the myths and legends of an alphabetic culture.”<sup>32</sup> African critics, on the other

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<sup>29</sup> Peggy Appiah, A West African Novelist, review of *Things Fall Apart*, by Achebe, *West Africa* 2148, (June 1958): p.565.

<sup>30</sup> Mercedes Mackay, review of *Things Fall Apart*, by Achebe, *African Affairs* 57, No. 228 (July 1958): pp. 242-243.

<sup>31</sup> Charles R. Larson, *The Emergence of African Fiction* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1978), p. 5.



hand, criticised the book for its lack of originality and focus on certain ‘sensational aspects’ of the folk tradition – witches, wizards, the violence of jungle life – which were thought to be merely feeding Western taste for the exotic.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, Ekwensi, who by 1961 had published two novels, *People of the City* and *Jagua Nana*, did not acquire a reputation as a skilled writer the way Achebe did with his first novel and was often criticised for the style and content of his novels which were “obviously stimulated primarily by English and American pulp fiction and fourth-rate motion pictures.”<sup>34</sup> Achebe was the example adopted by Hill in his search for new African writers. For him *Things Fall Apart* inaugurated a new phase for African writing and introduced a convincing African model that challenged Western audience and its primitive image of Africa. His mode of writing enabled him to “bridge the gulf between the innocence of Amos Tutuola and Ekwensi’s sophistication.” This is due to the impressions that “Tutuola was too primitively African to satisfy African readers and Ekwensi too thoroughly westernised to satisfy European readers.”<sup>35</sup>

As a reader and publisher, Hill was clearly dissatisfied with such ‘established’ modes of writing. In *Things Fall Apart*, he “had something entirely new from Africa: a novel which affirmed permanent human and social values in the context of a traditional tribal society in crisis, and which expressed those values in terms which the Western-educated reader could understand.”<sup>36</sup> In this favourable assessment he was not alone. Ben Obumselu too believed Achebe’s novel was “the *first English novel* in which the life and institutions of a West

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<sup>32</sup> Anthony West, “Shadow and Substance,” *The New Yorker*, 5 December 1953: pp.222-23, quoted in Steven M. Tobias, “Amos Tutuola and the Colonial Carnival,” *Research in African Literatures* 30, No. 2 (1999): p.66.

<sup>33</sup> See Jonathan A. Peters “English-language Fiction from West Africa,” in *A History of Twentieth-Century African Literatures*, ed. Oyekan Owomoyela (Lincoln, NB (USA); London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), pp.13-15. See also Achebe “Work and Play in Tutuola’s *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*,” *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays* (Oxford: Heinemann International, 1988) pp.68-76.

<sup>34</sup> Lindfors, *Early Nigerian Literature* (New York: Africana Publishing Co., 1982), p.8.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 8-9.

<sup>36</sup> Hill, p.121.

African people is presented from the inside.”<sup>37</sup> Interestingly, the emphasis put on its being the ‘first’ African novel of its kind was confirmed by placing it as the first text in the AWS. Perhaps Achebe’s position as a ‘third eye’, to borrow David Richards’ concept,<sup>38</sup> in-between ‘foreign’ writers (Joyce Cary’s, C. S. Fortser, and Christine Garnier) and ‘native’ ones (Tutuola), conveniently placed him to represent “the life and institutions of a West African people... from the inside.”<sup>39</sup> Such a position was acknowledged and verified by his English education, his commitment to a national project in the making, knowledge of local culture and history, a command of Igbo and English languages, not to mention his deep personal attachment to the Ibos. Hence, emphasising the writer’s precedence was naturally sustained by a general view that between the disparate ‘foreign’ and ‘native’ representations of ‘African reality’ Achebe’s stood as the most ‘objective’. *The Times Literary Supplement* noted that “[t]he great interest of this novel is that it *genuinely* succeeds in presenting tribal life from the inside.”<sup>40</sup> His position made it also easy for both ‘foreign’ and ‘native’ readers “to share the African’s experience of his masked gods, his oracles, and even his weather.”<sup>41</sup> There were a number of similar testimonies on the compelling realism of the novel. Diana Speed, for instance, noted that Achebe’s book could be read as “a piece of history.”<sup>42</sup> Mercedes Mackay, in turn, asserted that although it was a fictional narrative, the novel presented a “documentary account of the day to day happenings in a small Nigerian village without evasion, sophistry or apology.”<sup>43</sup> On the African side, Obumsele attributed the success of *Things Fall Apart* to Achebe’s

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<sup>37</sup> Ben Obumsele, review of *Things Fall Apart*, Ibadan, N 5, 20 February 1959, p.37. Italics added.

<sup>38</sup> David Richards, *Masks of Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp.222-24.

<sup>39</sup> Ben Obumsele, review of *Things Fall Apart*.

<sup>40</sup> P. S. Rawson, “The Centre Cannot Hold”, review of *Things Fall Apart*, by Achebe, *The Times Literary Supplement* 2938, (June 1958): p. 341. Italics added.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ezenwa-Ohaeto, *Chinua Achebe: a Biography*, p. 69.

<sup>43</sup> Mercedes Mackay, review of *Things Fall Apart*, by Achebe, *African Affairs* 57, No. 228 (July 1958): pp. 242-243.



“knowledge of the institutions of his people” and his ability to record “them without white-washing any ugly patches.”<sup>44</sup> “Life in Okonkwo’s village” he explained,

is orderly and serene. It does not have the sleek geometrical lines of European life, but it works. Men fall in Love, court and marry quite effectively without resort to the dance hall, the engagement ring and the marriage registry. There is no code of laws, no police force and no judiciary, but law and order are not inseparable from these devices....<sup>45</sup>

After it came out in a paperback edition in February 1962, the novel realised excellent sales figures and went through successive reprints. HEB publishers who had subcontracted the paperback rights for the English language market, publicized the novel in their ‘advance information’ sheet for their AWS edition, as a prize winner that had been prescribed “at all branches of the Nigerian College of Technology and Arts since 1959” which induced HEB to produce an “unabridged, illustrated educational edition.”<sup>46</sup> This new dimension of the novel as an educational text addressed to a purely academic community increased the popularity of the novel even outside the academic establishment. Achebe himself later endorsed such a reading of his novel when, in a conference at Leeds University in 1965, he said: “I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than *teach my readers* that their past – with all its imperfections – was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God’s behalf delivered them.”<sup>47</sup>

Given these multiple responses which the novel elicited, and the great success it enjoyed among teachers and students as well as among the larger public, it was not surprising that *Things Fall Apart* was reprinted more than thirty times in the AWS edition

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<sup>44</sup> Ben Obumselu, review of *Things Fall Apart*, by Achebe, *Ibadan* 5, (1959): p.37.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> See Advance Information of *Things Fall Apart*. HEB 6/11, Special Collections, University of Reading, Reading. (Hence, SC, Uni., of R, Reading).

<sup>47</sup> Achebe, *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays 1965-87* (Oxford: Heinemann International, 1988), pp 27-31. Italics added.

alone and translated into fifty languages. The lavish praise which it received encouraged Achebe to write new novels and extend his narrative beyond the theme of colonial encounter and clash of cultures.

### -III-

In August 1969, Douglas Killam of York University, Ontario, submitted a proposal to Sambrook to publish a collection of Achebe's short stories.<sup>48</sup> This volume of Achebe's writings was partly the fruit of a research trip the critic had undertaken to Nigeria three years earlier when he had tracked down some of Achebe's earlier writing with the prospect of using the material for his then forthcoming book on the work of Achebe.<sup>49</sup> Along with the proposal, Sambrook received a manuscript containing a short introduction and seven stories, namely "Beginning of the End", "Dead Men's Path", "Chike's School Days", "The Sacrificial Egg", "Akueke", "The Voter" and "Uncle Ben's Choice" numbering forty pages altogether.

When the Ibadan office were informed about the book proposal, it was discovered that Thomas Melone, who was then conducting research on Achebe, was in possession of another set of stories, "The Polar Undergraduate", "In a Village Church", and "The Old Order in Conflict with the New".<sup>50</sup> Given this new prospect, Melone not only insisted that the three stories should be included in the new edition, but also proposed to write his own introduction.<sup>51</sup> Eventually, it was agreed that Melone and Killam would share the task of editing the new collection of Achebe's stories.

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<sup>48</sup> Sambrook, London, to Douglas Killam, Guelph, 5 August 1969, HEB 6/12, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>49</sup> Killam visited Nigeria in autumn 1966. See his "Personal Note" in Kirsten Holst Peterson and A. Rutherford eds. *Chinua Achebe: A Celebration*, p.160. The book he published in 1969 was titled *The Novels of Chinua Achebe*.

<sup>50</sup> Melone was also to publish his book on Achebe under the title of *Chinua Achebe et la Tragedie de L'Histoire*, in 1973.

<sup>51</sup> Currey, London, to Killam, Guelph, 27 October 1969, HEB 6/12, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.



Having connected the two editors, Currey and Sambrook then sought the approval of the author himself for publishing the new volume of stories. Because of his deep involvement in the Biafran War, Achebe was not immediately available to his publishers. The two letters which Sambrook sent him failed to elicit any reaction.<sup>52</sup> Much later in 1969, Killam was able to convey from Montréal, following a meeting with Achebe, the author's "blessing" for the project. Killam also expressed the doubts that Achebe had about any stories Melone might have.<sup>53</sup> Encouraged by this verbal consent, Currey wrote to Achebe asking him to "drop a note" about the proposed collection before HEB could arrange for a contract.<sup>54</sup> While waiting for a response, Currey played the role of a coordinator between Melone and Killam in their exchange of the manuscript and comments on how the stories should be arranged. The collection, wrote Currey to Killam, "strikes me as being slightly extraordinary. Two literary appraisals followed by a chunk of juvenilia and then the stories, but there is no doubt that whatever we put out will sell."<sup>55</sup>

When the manuscript was finally handed over to a reader for assessment, serious criticism of the collection emerged. The reader's report stated that the two introductions were written without reference to each other. It also noted that the collection contained two similar versions of the same story. In terms of size, the stories themselves represented a ridiculously small portion of the entire volume. As for the evaluation of the content, the report even questioned the inclusion of "the first two pieces [which were] not stories at all, but essays" and proposed a total revision of Melone's essay which not only occupied eighteen of the 72 pages of the whole collection, but was "astonishingly badly written so that sometimes one wonders whether [Melone] is saying anything at all."<sup>56</sup> The reader

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<sup>52</sup> Currey, London, to Higo, Ibadan, 7 August 1969, HEB 6/12, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>53</sup> Killam, Guelph, to Sambrook, London, 17 October 1969, HEB 6/12, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>54</sup> Currey, London, to Achebe, Nsukka, 27 October 1969, HEB 6/12, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>55</sup> Currey, London, to Killam, Guelph, 27 October 1969, HEB 6/12, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

further suggested that “a few more stories need to be added to make a book of reasonable size.”<sup>57</sup>

The criticism and suggestions voiced in the reader’s report raised uncertainties about the project and compelled HEB to obtain the author’s response. This again proved a difficult endeavour. Failing to contact Achebe, Currey turned to his agent, David Higham with the contract and a letter explaining HEB’s intention to publish Achebe’s stories in their AWS.<sup>58</sup> Currey noted that William Heinemann did not “feel this collection [was] large enough for the English hardback market”<sup>59</sup> but believed that it would help “so many people in Africa who [were] studying Achebe’s novels”. The hope was that once Achebe would be able to resume his writing, “then he would perhaps like to collect a whole book of short stories.”<sup>60</sup>

Apparently such a hope largely depended on the political situation in Nigeria. The start of 1970 brought the announcement of cease fire and the subsequent surrender of the Biafran army. Achebe, among other Igbo intellectuals, was able to return home. The homecoming, however, was fraught with genuine troubles. As a “prominent rebel”, Achebe had to swallow not only the harsh reality of defeat, and loss of friends, relatives, personal property, including treasured manuscripts, but also endure painful humiliation by the Nigerian authorities. He recalled having to go through police clearance, where he “had to submit to questioning by all kinds of people. ‘What did you do as a rebel?’ etcetera, etcetera. Or ‘Write up a piece on what you did’”.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Anonymous, Reader’s Report, HEB 6/12, SC, Uni., of R, Reading. The report is in six pages including three pages of commentary on the two introduction and the stories and another three pages of queries, and suggestions for making few changes.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Currey, Internal Memo, to Amy Hoff, 10 November 1969, HEB 6/12, , SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>59</sup> Currey, London, to David Higham, London, 31 December 1969, HEB 6/12, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ezenwa-Ohaeto, *Chinua Achebe: A Biography*, pp. 153-4.



Of this period, Achebe's close friends were able to relate how he "was in a state of deep depression." Beier, for instance, was simply dismayed to see on British TV Ekwensi "trying to make a livelihood by selling old bottles on the market".<sup>62</sup> For Achebe, one could only guess, the wide interest shown in his writings guaranteed an income that practically allowed him to fare well through the period of crisis. Fortunately, in March 1970, academic and non-academic staffs were asked to report at Enugu. Plans were made to resuscitate the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. By May 1970, Achebe was reabsorbed as a senior research fellow in the Institute for African Studies. Such gradual restoration of former social and professional life enabled the rebel author to renew contact with his London publishers.

It did not take long for Achebe to resume his job as editorial advisor to the Series. Sambrook was impatient to inform him of the "number of Mss on which it would be very helpful to have your views."<sup>63</sup> Achebe, who was "looking forward to playing an active role once more in [the series'] development," accepted Hill's invitation to join the Board of Directors of the Nigerian branch.<sup>64</sup> The invitation came after major reorganization of the Nigerian branch. In 1969, the branch was incorporated in Nigeria to become HEB Nigeria Limited, a fully-fledged company with Higo as Managing Director and Hill as Chairman. The restructuring came after the Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Decree dictated that 40 per cent of the shares had to be transferred to Nigerian citizens by March 1974. Fearing the close link between HEB (Nigeria) and HEB (UK) and the "highly personalised HEB management style" which Higo had adopted "would be threatened by an influx of outside investors," Hill and Higo "carefully placed the shares with [their] directors and authors."<sup>65</sup> Achebe, as part and parcel of HEB's success in Africa, was well qualified to be part of the

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>63</sup> Sambrook, London, to Achebe, Nsukka, 15 July 1970, HEB 6/12, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>64</sup> Achebe, Nsukka, to Hill, London, 21 June 1970, HEB 6/12, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>65</sup> Hill, p.222.

new transformation. "I understand that the change-over procedures in Nigeria went quite smoothly," wrote Achebe to Hill, "I am really glad to be part of another HEB venture of faith."<sup>66</sup> It seems that the peace not only restored the status quo through the unification of Nigeria, but also reconnected Achebe with his publishers and opened a new horizon for creative writing.

Thus by the end of June 1970, Achebe, who was now holding a teaching position at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, finally returned a signed agreement for the short stories to his agent and requested to receive the complete manuscript prior to its publication.<sup>67</sup> Once the agreement was signed, an advance royalty of £100 was sent to Achebe's agent, while both Killam and Melone were given £55 each. The proposed royalty was 7½ per cent of UK and export prices on sales in UK and Africa.<sup>68</sup> Such an arrangement had already been made on the grounds that Achebe's name alone was a selling point. In an inter-memorandum, Currey stressed the view that "the contract has to be with Achebe. Editorial notes by Killam and Thomas Melone will be paid for by a fee."<sup>69</sup> Moreover, Achebe was free to keep or drop the introductory essays and proceed for publishing or wait until he could submit "a few more short stories and bring out a collection in a year or eighteen months."<sup>70</sup>

Aside from the complicated publishing process of this collection of short stories, it is remarkable that Achebe's name elicited such unusual esteem from the publishers that surpassed their treatment of other African writers. Omitting the names of Killam and Melone from the front cover and paying only a lip service to their efforts on the acknowledgment page was an extraordinary gesture. Was there a conviction that after the

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<sup>66</sup> Achebe, to Hill, 27 April 1974, HEB 6/3, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>67</sup> David Bolt (of David Higham, Literary Agent), London, to Amy Hoff, London, 26 June 1970, HEB 6/12, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>68</sup> See a copy of an Application for Contract of the "Short Stories", HEB 6/12, , SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>69</sup> Currey, Internal Memo, to Michael Harding and Tony Beal, 31 October 1969, HEB 6/12, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>70</sup> Sambrook, London, to Achebe, Nsukka, 15 June 197, HEB 6/12, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.



political upheavals in Nigeria which had drawn wide media and public interest, readers would now be curious to read Achebe's latest work? Perhaps it was the financial situation of Achebe that induced the HEB publishers to grant full royalties instead of splitting them with the two editors, especially that they had a plan for a large print run for of the book. For Achebe, who had nothing published for four years with HEB, this clearly was an advantageous deal, least of all a welcomed addition to his *oeuvre*.

The revision and enlargement of the volume suggested by Currey back in December 1969 stroke a chord with Achebe. He was able to rewrite the stories during the next seven months and add "two recent ones of considerable weight,"<sup>71</sup> 'Girls at War' and 'Vengeful Creditor'.<sup>72</sup> HEB's reaction to the revised manuscript was so favourable that they decided to publish the work without delay.<sup>73</sup> Their first step was to send a letter asking Cox and Wyman Ltd. for a provisional estimate for publishing 15,000 copies. The production, however, was temporarily suspended for two particular reasons. First, Achebe was in the process of writing another short story which he wanted to include in the collection. This turned out to be 'Civil Peace' sent to Sambrook in early June 1971, which the author believed would enhance the reception of "*Girls at War* as concluding story."<sup>74</sup> Second, the initial production estimate which cost 9.7p per copy meant that HEB would be unable to price the book economically for their African market if they published the book at 33p.<sup>75</sup> This induced HEB to seek other estimates from two more printers, Richard Clay Ltd. and Fletcher and Son Ltd. before negotiating with Cox and Wyman specific details of printing and binding to reduce the production costs.<sup>76</sup> Eventually a printing order of 15,000

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<sup>71</sup> Sambrook, London, to Achebe, Nsukka, 2 March 1971, HEB 6/5. See also Currey, to Michael Ward, Lusaka, 3 March 1971, HEB 6/5, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>72</sup> Sambrook, London, to Achebe, Nsukka, 15 July 1970 HEB 6/12, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>73</sup> Sambrook, letter to Achebe, 2 March 1971, HEB 6/5. See also Currey, London, to Michael Ward, Lusaka, 3 March 1971, HEB 6/5, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>74</sup> Achebe, Nsukka, to Sambrook, London, 5 June 1971, HEB 6/5, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>75</sup> John Sharp, Production Estimate sheet, 27 April 1971, HEB 6/5, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

was sent to Cox and Wyman Ltd.<sup>77</sup> This was a significant order although short stories as a genre were generally deemed less saleable than novels. Indeed the expectations of HEB exceeded the average printing order of 7000 copies which most publishers in the business would command in similar circumstances. The significance of such printing order does not only seem to be related to the exceptional status Achebe had attained since the publication of *Things Fall Apart*, but also built on the assumption that readers would “be buying [Achebe’s] book partly to read [his] reactions to the everyday happenings of the war.”<sup>78</sup>

Within a month of his reception of the manuscript of his volume of short stories, Achebe returned the proofs without inserting any corrections. The only comment he made involved the cover which he found “less and less attractive.”<sup>79</sup> At his request, the cover was altered and an advance copy was forwarded to him in Nsukka by 25<sup>th</sup> November 1971. And while final copies were received by HEB on 17<sup>th</sup> December, the publication date, nevertheless, was postponed till 28 February 1972.<sup>80</sup>

Between 14<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> February, Achebe was due to appear on a BBC Two programme called ‘Review’.<sup>81</sup> This was Achebe’s first visit to England after the end of the war. This was an occasion to familiarise the metropolitan audiences with the concerns and achievements of African writers. It was also an opportune moment to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the AWS which was intended to coincide with the publication of *Girls at War*. In organising these events, HEB posed as the leading publishing firm of African literature. On the other hand, HEB seized the interval of time prior to the publication date to carry out extensive publicity of the collection and the Series at large. The indefatigable

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<sup>76</sup> These details meant to decrease the production’s costs and they were related to the quality of paper, number of pages, printing and the form of binding.

<sup>77</sup> Hill and Richard Gale, Final production sheet, 29 September 1971, HEB 6/5, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>78</sup> Currey, London, to Achebe, Nsukka, 17 June 1971, HEB 6/5, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>79</sup> Achebe, Nsukka, to Serena Gold, London, 20 October 1971, HEB 6/5, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>80</sup> Sambrook, London, to Achebe, Nsukka, 25 November 1971, HEB 6/5, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>81</sup> Hill, London, to Achebe, Nsukka, 7 January 1972, HEB 6/5, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.



Currey wrote to a number of literary editors eliciting their attention to the new volume and the Series at large. To William Webb from *The Guardian*, he wrote the following:

*Girls at War* by Chinua Achebe is the one hundredth title in the African Writers Series, which has been central to the wide development of writing in English in Africa. We suggest that this might be an occasion for a general review of this whole new field of English literature.... Is there any chance of Terry Coleman or anybody else interviewing him? I should have thought it was a natural for *Guardian* readers, especially as he was deeply involved in the Biafran War.<sup>82</sup>

The occasion had sometimes to be overplayed to generate the interest of reviewers, as was the case in Currey's letter to Allan Morris: "I would have thought a feature article in *Drum* would be useful" because the BBC, the *Times Educational Supplement* and *Times Literary Supplement* were "going to have some sort of special coverage of African writing."<sup>83</sup> At other times, the publicity campaign took even more insistent forms. Having sent copies of the book to *The Times*, Currey asked Michael Wolffers if he could interview Achebe, and "suggest an article to [reviewers], with general consideration of the growth of writing in Africa over the last ten years".<sup>84</sup> The enthusiasm to make the event successful reveals the extent to which Achebe had attained a place in the literary scene. Celebration was also induced by another factor. Achebe was getting ready to announce his decision to relinquish the editorship of the Series. Recalling this event, Hill wrote:

We celebrated the occasion at the Athenaeum Club in London. Leading critics and authors such as J.B. Priestley, C.P. Snow and Angus Wilson gathered to pay tribute to Achebe, who gave a characteristically modest and humorous account of the years of his editorship.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Currey, London, to William Webb, London, 18 January 1972, HEB 6/5, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>83</sup> Currey, London, to Alan Morris, London, 6 January 1972, HEB 6/5, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>84</sup> Currey, London to Michael Wolffers, London, 19 January 1972, HEB 6/5, SC, Uni., of R, Reading. Meanwhile, To *The Observer*, Currey wrote asking if they there was "some place for a feature in *The Observer* about African writing as a whole, using the hundredth title in the African Writers series as a trigger." See Currey, letter to Colin and Margaret Legum, 28 January 1972, HEB 6/5.

<sup>85</sup> See Hill, *In Pursuit of Publishing*, p. 143. Hill mistakenly says that the event took place on November 1972. Achebe's biographer, quoting Hill, makes the same mistake claiming that Achebe stood down in November. In fact, Achebe was teaching in the United States and had very little contact with HEB at the

During the event, Achebe paid his tribute to the influence British publishers – and HEB in particular – had had in Africa by encouraging young African writers to write at a time “when few people believed that Africa could have a modern literature of its own.” He was also reported to have said that London’s pre-eminence as a centre of African publishing would soon be challenged. For him, the emergence of African critics, a new readership, and new African publishers signified “home rule in African publishing.”<sup>86</sup> Achebe was not only talking out of optimism. His next published work attempted to mirror his words.

#### -IV-

By the time *Girls at War* was published, HEB was already planning to publish another new book by Achebe, a collection of poems. The novelist’s turn to poetry came about when he felt reluctant to write novels amid the uncertainties of the civil war. “The thing”, he confessed in an interview with Ernest and Pat Emenyonu “is that during the war I just wasn’t able to write a novel or think of writing a novel. On the other hand, I was able to write some poetry, some short and intense pieces.”<sup>87</sup>

Once completed, the volume of poems in its manuscript form had been first submitted to an independent Nigerian publisher, Nwamife Publishers. The company had been set up by Arthur Nwankwo and Samuel Ifejika and encouraged by some prominent Ibos like Achebe as “a step towards re-establishing self-esteem in the defeated East.”<sup>88</sup> The publishers, Nwankwo and Ifejika, had been outspoken activists travelling in Europe to further the Biafran cause at a time when Achebe, Okara and Ekwensi were touring the USA to raise

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time. On the other hand, they all agree, including Sambrook and Currey, that Achebe stood down as the editorial advisor for the AWS at the launch party of *Girls at War*, which took place late in February 1972.

<sup>86</sup> P.H.S, Home Rule, review of *Things Fall Apart*, by Achebe, *The Times*, 29 February 1972, N 58406, p.12, Col. D.

<sup>87</sup> Lindfors, ed., *Conversations with Chinua Achebe* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), p. 39.

<sup>88</sup> Christopher Hurst, *The View from King Street: An Essay in Autobiography* (London: C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd, 1997), p.357.



funds.<sup>89</sup> When the company came into being late in 1970, it had an ambitious programme of publishing. Their list contained an impressive range of titles that ranged from serious academic studies to creative writings, whose prime concern was the Nigerian civil war. Achebe's unreserved support for such a publishing adventure assumed two forms. First, by becoming Nwamife's Editorial Advisor, he displayed an interest in taking up the role he had played in HEB. Second, along with the volume of poetry, Achebe showed a keen interest in enabling the infant company to acquire an established reputation. To this end he gave his consent to Nwamife to publish, *How the Leopard Got His Claws* (a children book written by Achebe and John Iroaganachi), *Okike* (A Nigerian Journal of New Writing edited by Achebe), and *The Insider: Stories of War and Peace* (an anthology edited by Achebe). This close collaboration with the company, it was hoped, would increase its sales and enhance its position in the market.

To Currey, the author's association with Nwamife Publishers reflected "a conflict in Chinua Achebe's loyalties."<sup>90</sup> This may have been overstated. For Achebe had a longstanding belief in the necessity of creating a local publishing industry, despite the limited prospects of its market. Already in 1966 just before the war broke out, he had tried to set up a publishing firm called Citadel Press with Christopher Okigbo, who was then the agent of Cambridge University Press. Much later in 1973 Achebe gave a paper on 'Publishing in Africa' in a conference held at the University of Ife. His principal concern was to encourage further engagement on the part of publishers in the growth and dissemination of African literatures:

We have got to the point where our literature must grow out of the social dynamics of Africa. The role of the publisher as catalyst is no longer adequate – that of initiating and watching over a chemical reaction from a position of inviolability and emerging at the end of it all totally unchanged. What we need is an organic interaction of all three elements – writer, publisher, and reader – in a continuing state of

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid, p.356.

<sup>90</sup> Currey, "Africa Writes Back", (manuscript), p.46.

creative energy in which all three respond to the possibilities and the risks of change.<sup>91</sup>

Still, Achebe seemed interested in maintaining his 'natural publishing rhythm' with metropolitan publishers, which would secure the collection a wider dissemination. Thus, by the end of February 1971, he sent a copy of the manuscript to Higo, who, in turn, forwarded it to Sambrook. The latter's reaction was entirely favourable. He found the poems "interesting, some very good [...] and a number very moving."<sup>92</sup> Given this positive feedback from the senior publisher, several intricate questions immediately came to the surface. Publishing the collection in the AWS had to be preceded by prior negotiations with the Nigerian publisher. Sambrook was curious to know whether Nwankwo would agree to jointly publish the collection. "But what could we offer him in Nigeria – apart from money?" asked Sambrook. His apprehensive question revealed the attitude of a vigilant publisher eager to volunteer propositions to safeguard HEB's interests. Keen to know who controlled world rights of the work outside Nigeria, Sambrook confidently wrote a letter to Higo outlining his broad scheme to co-operate with Nwamife Publishers. In the first place, he advocated offsetting from "a well-produced" Nigerian edition and paying a litho fee in addition to a royalty. This implied that HEB would control the world market except in Nigeria where a local edition would be produced. As part of AWS, it was assumed, the volume of poems would not be available at the Nigerian market. In the second place, assuming that Achebe had retained "all rights", Sambrook suggested encouraging the author to negotiate directly with HEB for an AWS edition, as this would secure him direct payment of royalties rather than sharing them with the Nigerian publisher.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day: Essays* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press, Doubleday, 1975), p.110.

<sup>92</sup> Sambrook, London, to Higo, Ibadan, 23 March 1971, HEB 6/4, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.



As it were, Sambrook's suggestion to issue the AWS edition of the collection marked as 'not for sale in Nigeria' was not a welcomed news for Higo, who felt his company would be excluded from playing any role either in the publishing or the distribution of the book. On second thought, Sambrook altered his plan and proposed that HEB (Nigeria) could cooperate with Nwamife Publishers on an edition that would be listed as 'for sale in Nigeria'. HEB (UK) then would be able to offset from their edition for its 'non-Nigeria' edition, "but change the prelims, showing 'HEB' only on the title page but acknowledging the HEB (Nigeria)/ Nwamife on the verso."<sup>94</sup> Sambrook even took the trouble to suggest how the two editions could be publicised. In his words,

We could also print somewhere on the cover of the 'non-Nigeria' edition a note saying: "The Nigerian edition is published jointly by HEB (N) and Nwamife Ltd and is obtainable from..." Then HEB (N) could list the Nigerian edition with other AWS (perhaps mentioning that it is published as an AWS title in UK for sales outside Nigeria and is Number....) Would this be OK?<sup>95</sup>

These elaborate designs seemed to fall through after Nwamife Publishers had brought out their own edition of the book in June 1971 containing 23 poems. The news was surprising for both Currey and Sambrook, particularly as they came to know of the publication event three months later. Clearly this marked a breakdown in communication not only between HEB (UK) and HEB (Nigeria), but also between HEB (UK) and Achebe, not to mention the failure to establish contact with Nwamife whose director and Editorial Advisor, oddly enough, was Achebe himself.<sup>96</sup> Confident that a favourable deal could still be reached with Nwamife, Sambrook turned to the author's London agent, David Bolt, to express the HEB's willingness to publish the book "in the UK and the commonwealth, except

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<sup>94</sup> Sambrook, London, to Higo, Ibadan, 20 April 1971, HEB 6/4, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Currey, London, to Higo, Ibadan, 10 September, 1971. HEB 6/4, SC, Uni., of R, Reading. Currey said: "I have not heard anything from you since I wrote my memo of the 21 July, 1971."

Nigeria.”<sup>97</sup> Assuming that the current situation was the outcome of a lack of communication, Sambrook wrote to all parties the following:

It seems to me best that David Bolt should now communicate with both you and the author rather than have too many people offering and being offered rights. As far as we are concerned we would very much like to publish Chinua Achebe’s poems in British and Commonwealth markets except Nigeria and to include the book in our African Writers Series. We are anxious to draw up a contract as soon as possible. However we are not quite clear whether this should be drawn up direct with the author or with Nwamife and for this reason we think it is best to leave David Bolt to act for the author.<sup>98</sup>

Acquainted with HEB’s plans, David Bolt tried to explain the misunderstandings and confusion that had emerged between Achebe and HEB. His correspondence with Achebe not only revealed that Nwamife Publishers controlled the world right of the volume of poems, but that HEB seemed to have been given the first option, a matter which HEB, in Achebe’s words, had “not followed up [...] as they said they would – which puts [him] in rather an awkward position.”<sup>99</sup>

Following this justification, Sambrook wrote to Nwankwo making a formal proposal to publish an edition of the poems under their title *Beware Soul Brother* in the AWS. He also expressed HEB’s wish to sell in open market areas such as Europe and Japan, alongside the US edition, which he gathered would be published by Doubleday. In return for these rights, HEB offered to pay Nwamife a royalty of 10% on the UK published price on all copies sold.<sup>100</sup> Nwankwo’s response was more than positive. He agreed to send Sambrook new poems and notes to include in the proposed edition *Beware Soul Brother*, and even placed an order of 3000 copies of the new edition.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Sambrook, London, to Achebe, Nsukka, 5 November 1971, HEB 6/4, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>98</sup> Sambrook, London, to Arthur Nwankwo, Enugu, 8 November 1971, HEB 6/4, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>99</sup> Bolt, London, to Hoff, London, 26 November 1971, HEB 6/4, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>100</sup> Sambrook, London, to Arthur Nwankwo, Enugu, 14 December 1971, HEB 6/4, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>101</sup> Nwankwo, Enugu, to Sambrook, London, 3 January 1972, HEB 6/4, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.



Delighted by the news and looking forward to receiving the additional poems which the author was supplying, Sambrook prepared the book project for HEB's weekly board meeting of 19<sup>th</sup> of January 1972.<sup>102</sup> He even circulated a memo defending his decision to offer a 10% royalty to Nwamife Publishers. The memo asserted that this was a reasonable percentage on a collection of poems which HEB could price economically. Moreover, the unusual increase from the 7½ % to 10%, which HEB normally offered on AWS titles, would not only secure Achebe a better share in a royalty of which he would get 50% or, at most, 75%, but also guarantee HEB publishing a book that "several publishers have been after."<sup>103</sup>

Thus when Sambrook received the long-awaited manuscript on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 1972, work on the collection finally seemed to make headway. The manuscript, in fact, did not require much editorial work. Arguably, this was because Achebe had supplied a well edited manuscript. Certainly HEB editors could not do much about poems that had already been in print. Yet, Achebe, in the Preface of HEB edition, briefly explained the difference between the two editions. He "retained all the twenty-three original poems in the present volume though some of them have been revised, a few re-written completely, and one given a brand new name."<sup>104</sup> He also explained that "there are seven later poems bringing the total in the present volume to thirty – a more rounded and, to the mind, more restful figure than twenty-three. I have also grouped the entire work into five sections that have suggested themselves to my mind."<sup>105</sup> Still, the AWS archive reveals that Sambrook, more than anything, concerned himself with the question of titles. Apart from replacing a title of a poem called 'Riddle' with 'The Explorer', which Achebe referred to in his Preface, he felt that it would be better to keep 'Beware Soul Brother' as

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<sup>102</sup> Sambrook, London, to Nwankwo, Enugu, 14 January 1972, HEB 6/4, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>103</sup> Sambrook, Memo to Hill, Amy Hoff, Currey and Higo, 14 January 1972, HEB 6/4, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>104</sup> Achebe, Preface to *Beware, Soul Brother: Poems* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1972).

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

the title of the collection despite the author's choice of 'Christmas in Biafra'. Sambrook explained that it might "be confusing to have two collections published, the contents of which are substantially the same under different titles."<sup>106</sup>

Achebe's response to the idea was positive, albeit for a different reason. He mainly feared that in case HEB published the collection as *Christmas in Biafra* and simultaneously printed their announcement as 'Not for sale in Nigeria', people might interpret it differently. He recognized that the whole notion of 'Biafra' was still a dangerous one to be used amid the political uncertainties of the civil war, particularly by an author, let us reiterate, who had advocated its cause and was labelled as a prominent rebel by the Nigerian authorities. The reality, however, was that the legacy of the civil war was too painful to bear for the then much disillusioned Achebe. In a letter to Sambrook, he confessed that he had decided to go to the United States with his family for a year "just to give them a break".<sup>107</sup> Achebe's acceptance of an offer of a Visiting Professor at the Department of English and Afro-America Studies at the University of Massachusetts seemed to enable him to distance himself for a sufficient time from the tortuous political and academic conditions in Nigeria.

The decision to hire Achebe to teach at the prestigious American university was a credit to his literary career, and was soon followed by other forms of recognition. On the 5<sup>th</sup> October 1972, a formal invitation to "a Round Table of writers of world reputation to be held in connection with the regular executive meeting of International PEN"<sup>108</sup> was sent out to Achebe by The PEN centre in Stockholm. The conference was to take place on the first week of May 1973, and was intended to address the multiple political, social, and ethical roles of the writer. Among the invitees were Doris Lessing, Anthony Burgess, John Updike, Kurt Vonnegut, Nadine Gordimer, V.S Naipaul, Aime Cesaire, Wole Soyinka,

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<sup>106</sup> Sambrook, London, to Achebe, Nsukka, 10 May 1972, HEB 6/4, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>107</sup> Achebe, Nsukka, to Sambrook, London, 21 May 1972, HEB 6/4. , SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>108</sup> Per Wastberg, Stajarnan, to Achebe, Nsukka, 5 October 1972, HEB 6/4., SC, Uni., of R, Reading.



Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Italo Calvino, and Alejo Carpentier, to mention only a few. It is remarkable that on the same day in which this invitation was sent to Achebe, the Deputy Librarian at the Commonwealth Institute, Mrs. C. Keane, sent a letter to Currey disclosing the highly confidential news that Achebe was the joint-winner of the Commonwealth Poetry Prize for *Beware Soul Brother*. Knowing that the publication date of the collection would be on the 13<sup>th</sup> of October, Mrs. Keane's purpose was to enquire about the possibility of making the publication date coincide with the first day of the Commonwealth Book Fair.<sup>109</sup>

Of this inner circle of people, Achebe, now teaching in the USA, was possibly the last to know about the prize, and a letter of apology from Currey explained how he, “unforgivably, mixed up the University of Massachusetts with Amherst College,” to which address both HEB and the Commonwealth Institute had sent their messages of congratulations.<sup>110</sup> This slight confusion was only a trifle compared with the failure of HEB to honour its promise to Nwamife Publishers to supply 3000 copies of the new edition of *Beware Soul Brother*.<sup>111</sup> The effect of the prize on the sales of the volume of poems was strong. Currey explained “that in the rush to get copies available for the presentation of the Commonwealth Poetry Prize, we had to print without your edition.”<sup>112</sup> Nwankwo was disappointed to learn that the ordered copies of the new edition had not been printed. His company had already completed arrangements to distribute the book to schools in December for the following school year which would begin in January 1973. Nwankwo hoped HEB would speed up production to enable his company meet the demand of its customers in January.<sup>113</sup> Still, Currey's response carried further disappointing news.

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<sup>109</sup> C. Keane, London, to Currey, London, 5 October 1972, HEB 6/4, SC, Uni., of R, Reading. The date of the Commonwealth Book Fair was 11<sup>th</sup> October 1972.

<sup>110</sup> Currey, London, to Achebe, Amherst, 1 November 1972, HEB 6/4, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>111</sup> Nwankwo, Enugu, to Hoff, London, 22 November, 1972, HEB 6/4, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>112</sup> Currey, London, to Nwankwo, Enugu, 29 November, 1972, HEB 6/4, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>113</sup> Nwankwo, Enugu, to Currey, London, 6 December 1972, HEB 6/4, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

“I fear that even if we had had the material from you at an earlier date”, he noted, “we should have had difficulty in meeting your January date because of the time it takes to ship stock.”<sup>114</sup> It was only by the end of May 1973 that HEB was finally able to ship Nwamife’s order.<sup>115</sup>

Reading the correspondence between the two publishing houses, one can easily sense how indifferent HEB was in their communication with the still infant indigenous publisher, who seemed to have very little or no experience to speak of in dealing with multinational publishers. HEB seemed to have put their interest before their co-publishers’ in a deal where there was very little margin of profit. HEB printed the book on behalf of Nwamife at the price of 13p per copy, exclusive of any royalty payable to the author, while it sold its AWS edition for 40p per copy. Besides, HEB was bound by such a deal to not sell the title in Nigeria, Canada, the United States and “its territories”, and the Philippines. Thus, for a title whose rights it did not control and for an edition which was not a source of profit, HEB appeared to be little concerned.

The point I want to emphasize here, however, is that what seemed essential for HEB at the time was to get Achebe’s single collection of poems on their AWS list. It was important for HEB to publish a creative work that exhibited Achebe’s reaction to the civil war, but more importantly for HEB as a ‘specialized’ publisher in African literature was to ensure that its publishing programme went hand in hand with the creative progress of its authors. Achebe’s creative writing was clearly affected by much of the political, social and cultural actuality in his country. For HEB, who seemed aware of this tendency among a number of African writers, it was crucial to attune their publishing plans with the creative writings that dealt with the African situation.

All in all, 1972 was a successful year for HEB during which no less than twenty two books appeared in print under the African Writers Series. This success was in a large

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<sup>114</sup> Currey, London, to Nwankwo, Enugu, 15 December 1972, HEB 6/4, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>115</sup> Currey, London, to Nwankwo, Enugu, 21 May 1973, HEB 6/4, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.



part enabled by the profit made out of Achebe's books and which, according to Hill, "provided the economic basis for the rest of the series."<sup>116</sup> Motivated by his own achievements and emboldened in his resolve to continue his creative enterprise, Achebe started thinking of a new project, a novel.

## -V-

Chapter Seven of *Anthills of the Savannah* starts with the following paragraph:

For weeks and months after I had definitely taken on the challenge of bringing together as many broken pieces of this tragic history as I could lay my hands on I still could not find a way to begin. Anything I tried to put down sounded wrong – either too abrupt, too indelicate or too obvious – to my middle ear.<sup>117</sup>

Perhaps the monologue echoes the considerable difficulties Achebe himself encountered in writing his fifth novel. In an interview with Jane Wilkinson, he recounts the following:

I started writing it about fifteen years ago and put it away completely. When I picked it up again about five years ago, I had to read it carefully to see who and what were there and it still didn't advance at all, so I had the characters, these four people, who were there, but I hadn't got anything I considered adequate for them to do. But three years ago – I don't have fully know why three years ago it was different – I picked the thing up again and reread it in order to get acquainted once more with the characters, and the story seemed to be there this time.<sup>118</sup>

When he completed the manuscript, Achebe forwarded it to David Bolt, his agent in London. Bolt soon presented a copy to Andre Deutsch. The latter offered an advance of £5,000 in conjunction with Penguin. The advantage of their offer was that Achebe would get full paperback royalty instead of having to share them with the hardcover publishers. Deutsch however, was a little reserved about the quality of the manuscript which he called a "flawed masterpiece", implying that the novel required some editorial work. Not happy

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<sup>116</sup> Peterson and Rutherford eds. *Chinua Achebe: A Celebration*, p.152.

<sup>117</sup> Achebe, *Anthills of the Savannah* (London: William Heinemann, 1987; Oxford: Heinemann Educational Books, 1988), p. 82.

<sup>118</sup> Jane Wilkinson, *Talking With African Writers: Interviews with African Poets, Playwrights & Novelists* (Oxford: James Currey, 1992), p.50.

with Deutsch's offer, Bolt placed a second copy of the manuscript with the 'head' of Century Hutchinson, who had expressed keen interest in publishing Achebe's novel. Bolt, however, gave the company two weeks to make their bid. Failing that, he told Achebe, "my inclination would be to hold a proper auction. But this means another four or five copies of the manuscript, and I don't want to put you to the expense if you disagree with my policy."<sup>119</sup> Achebe, however, chose "to leave the matter in [Bolt's] hands."<sup>120</sup>

Although there is no account of what happened with the 'head' of Century Hutchinson, it is clear that his bid, if he did in fact make one, was unsuccessful. Achebe's archives housed at Houghton Library, Harvard University, reveal some interesting, though confusing details. HEB came to the scene three months after the exchange mentioned above between Bolt and Achebe. The 14<sup>th</sup> of November was set as a deadline to submit their bid. It is not clear why William Heinemann and HEB were not given the first option on the novel as they happened to be the original hardback and paperback publishers of Achebe. Was it the policy of David Bolt to elicit the reactions of other publishers before turning to the old Heinemanns?

As the closing date drew near, Hill confessed to Higo in a telegram dated the 5<sup>th</sup> of November 1986 that "much is at stake for you and us".<sup>121</sup> The message did not only show that HEB were given a late chance to make their bid, but the medium through which it was transmitted reveals the extent to which this was both an urgent and delicate issue. The purpose of the telegram was also to make sure that Achebe had received a previous telegram sent by Mike Esplen. "We are deep into this", Esplen had said referring to the manuscript,

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<sup>119</sup> David Bolt, London, to Achebe, Nsukka, 7 August 1986, Achebe's Papers, b,MS Eng 1406, Folder, 131, Houghton Library, Harvard College Library, Harvard University. (hence abbreviated as C. Achebe's Papers, b,MS Eng 1406, H. L., Harvard C. L., Harvard University.)

<sup>120</sup> Achebe, Nsukka, to Bolt, London, 21 August 1986, C. Achebe's Papers, b,MS Eng 1406, Folder, 131 H. L., Harvard C. L., Harvard University.

<sup>121</sup> Hill, Telegram to Higo, 5 November 1986, C. Achebe's Papers, b,MS Eng 1406, Folder, 133, H. L., Harvard C. L., Harvard University.



It is marvellous. Alan says it is a winner which will still further enhance the Achebe reputation. The situation is that Andre Deutsch/Penguin have put in a bid to David Bolt. We are working on a strong competitive bid from William Heinemann/Pan/HEB which we plan to submit to Bolt next week. Bolt said that if Deutsch/Penguin got it there would be no room for AWS/HEB. This would be unthinkable. We understood from you in Ibadan that whatever else happens to Hardback and trade paperback right you wanted the book to be available to HEB (Nigeria) and in AWS. For the future of AWS, it would seem important that your wishes are clearly passed in writing to Bolt, prior to his acceptance of either bid.<sup>122</sup>

The profound anxiety conveyed in these words exposes the extent to which Achebe was important to the publishing policy of AWS. The crisis which hit the AWS in the mid 1980's as described in Chapter Two was perhaps a compelling cause that urged HEB to fight for the right to publish Achebe's new novel, a right that was perhaps justified on the ground that Heinemann had been the original publishers of Achebe since 1958. Bolt, who seems to have concealed both the author's and his dissatisfaction with Deutsch/Penguin's bid, cunningly pushed HEB to the edge of appealing to the author to intervene in granting HEB the right to publish the AWS edition of the novel. Achebe, on the other hand, sensibly kept his disappointment of Deutsch's offer away from Hill and Esplen with whom he had recently met in Ibadan. Yet, given his wish to see the novel published in the AWS, Achebe's reluctance to offer the book to William Heinemann and HEB from the start remains rather ambiguous. Was he trying to escape the 'African identity' with which AWS had been closely associated for a more successful paperback publisher as Penguin? Was he interested in reaching out to new readers beyond the traditional framework of AWS? Or was he simply seeking a different strategy of producing his books via hardback and trade paperback?

Regardless of Achebe's intentions, HEB showed a strong interest in keeping their best selling African author in the fold. Their bid, though practically reasonable, was further invigorated by Hill's persuasive approach. It is important to note that the retirement of Hill in 1979 and the departure of Currey in 1984 from the firm have had an impact on Achebe's

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

relationship with HEB. Achebe's long friendship with Hill and Currey overshadowed the simple publisher – author relation.<sup>123</sup> Hill's return to work for HEB as a consultant in June 1986 must have had a remarkable impact on Achebe, whose acquaintance with the crisis befalling the series and the pride he might have felt in the way he was called upon to save its future were credible motives for him to accept HEB/Pan/William Heinemann's bid.

Once the bidding situation was cleared and the manuscript rested in the hands of William Heinemann, editorial work was finally underway. Amanda Conquy, Achebe's editor at William Heinemann, introduced herself with flattering words echoing an appreciation for the author's acceptance to continue his association with Heinemann: "We are all of us here delighted and *honoured* to be publishing as fine and important a book as *Anthills of the Savannah*. It will be one of our major titles for the autumn list and we shall publish in October."<sup>124</sup> Because the plan was to produce the hardback edition of the novel within months, the attention the manuscript was receiving from William Heinemann seemed special. The jacket department was "already thinking hard about the cover design."<sup>125</sup> The blurb was sent to the author for his comments and possible alterations. A detailed report with comments and queries was also being prepared by the editor who was engaged in re-reading and editing the typescript. Even a short biography was requested from Achebe for publicity purposes and use on the cover.<sup>126</sup>

Eight months later when the novel was short-listed for the Booker Prize, Conquy, who had never met Achebe, explained that she "much enjoyed dealing with him by the slightly old-fashioned means of correspondence. In some cases it is necessary to suggest quite major structural changes or draw attention to inappropriate characters. But with

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<sup>123</sup> When I visited Currey in his office at James Currey Publishers in August 2005, the only picture on the wall was Achebe's.

<sup>124</sup> Conquy, London, to Achebe, Nsukka, 3 February 1987, C. Achebe's Papers, b,MS Eng 1406, Folder,136, H. L., Harvard C. L., Harvard University. Italics added.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.



Achebe there were just some small stylistic queries.”<sup>127</sup> For her, editing involved corresponding with agents, reading manuscripts, maintaining contact with the author, and consulting him on such questions as cover design and publicity procedures. “I find,” she confessed, “that if I like a book, I invariably like the author.”<sup>128</sup>

The relatively swift pace at which the publishing of *Anthills* proceeded was reassuring for Achebe. His instant response contained more than an explicit sign of satisfaction:

I am glad to be working with an editor again at William Heinemann and, what is more, an editor who has a good opinion of the book in question. I look forward to your comments in due course. I have forwarded to my agent 15-odd pages of the changes and additions to the text of the novel. I hope they will have reached you for your re-reading of the typescript. The blurb is excellent. But as I am aware that a sensitive editor would shy away from excessive advertisement of her own author, I have decided to pitch in with a couple of additional praises. Hope you don't mind! The biographical data is obviously too long for the cover. But I am sure it is better to have more than you need in the files. Incidentally there are one or two terrible photographs at HEB. So let me know what you intend to use. That is if you are thinking of using a photograph.<sup>129</sup>

While the fifty-six old Achebe agreed to write his own biographical note and select a convenient photo to display on the cover, his publisher and agent fell to their tasks with remarkable alacrity. David Bolt, who had now securely placed a complete manuscript of *Anthills* with Heinemann, set off to sell translation rights to other publishers. He had handed a copy of the manuscript to “the London scout for a number of foreign publishers”. “The ‘vibes’,” he informed Achebe, were “increasingly healthy” as the novel had been “earmarked for France, The Netherlands and Italy.”<sup>130</sup> Helen Armitage, the Managing Editor at William Heinemann, informed Achebe by mid May that the novel's date of

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<sup>127</sup> Pearson Phillips, “Midwife with a blue pen”, *The Times*, 28 October 1987.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Achebe, Nsukka, to Conquy, London, 16 February, 1987, C. Achebe's Papers, b,MS Eng 1406, Folder,136,H. L, Harvard C. L., Harvard University.

<sup>130</sup> Bolt, London, to Achebe, Nsukka,19 June 1987, C. Achebe's Papers, b,MS Eng 1406, Folder,131, H. L, Harvard C. L., Harvard University.

publication was brought forward to the 21<sup>st</sup> of September.<sup>131</sup> Expecting the finished copies of *Anthills* by August, the Publicity Manager asked Achebe to provide a list of useful contacts to which proof copies would be sent for reviews. Other copies had been sent out to reviewers in the UK. It was clear that the “work was now surfacing”.<sup>132</sup>

The news of the publication of Achebe’s fifth novel, the first in twenty-one years seemed to attract considerable attention. Reviews started to appear early in September. Writing for *The Guardian*, Margaret Busby, the Editorial Director of Allison & Busby Limited and one of the first African publishers in the UK, considered the novel “a masterly tour de force, written with elegance, irony, hope.” In line with the newspaper’s left-wing tendency, the reviewer emphasised the critical tone of the novel which “reverberates with a message for contemporary Africa’s politicians in its treatment of the links between power and destruction, loyalty and betrayal.”<sup>133</sup> Bernard Levin, the prominent columnist of *The Times* wittily noted that “Mr. Achebe would do well to buy a large false beard, against the possibility that the next Nigerian coup will be another military one.” Although Levin was mainly a political commentator, his review of *Anthills* focused on the individuality of the novel which seemed to emanate from the overall “Africanness” which characterized its mood, style and content:

But this author is not content to tell a plain tale of villainy and courage; he goes deeper. African legends wander in and out of the book, their central figures making parallels with those in the story; African proverbs - 'The goat owned in common dies of hunger' (which might be black Africa's epitaph) - add salt to the tragi-comedy; pessimism and cynicism contend for mastery, and hope, almost incredibly, walks off with the prize.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Helen Armitage (Managing Editor), London, to Achebe, Nsukka, 14 May 1987, C. Achebe’s Papers, b,MS Eng 1406, Folder, 136, H. L, Harvard C. L., Harvard University.

<sup>132</sup> Sarah Philips (Publicity Manager), to Achebe, Nsukka, 24 June 1987, C. Achebe’s Papers, b,MS Eng 1406, Folder.136, H. L, Harvard C. L., Harvard University.

<sup>133</sup> Margaret Busby, “Special Report on Nigeria (8): Written in Africa – Literature,” review of *Anthills of the Savannah*, by Achebe, *The Guardian*, 3 September, 1987.

<sup>134</sup> Bernard Levin, “What must a people do?”, review of *Anthills of the Savannah*, by Chinua Chinua, *The Times*, 20 September 1987, Issue 8511.



These early reviews were soon followed by numerous favourable commentaries when the book came out and was short-listed for the 1987 Booker Prize. W. L. Webb approvingly noted that Achebe's novel "would be an ornament for the prize."<sup>135</sup> Mary Hope's review of the novel for *The Financial Times* echoed statements made about *Things Fall Apart* thirty years earlier. *Anthills*, for her, was "an extended meditation on the way forward for a new African society, told with all Achebe's story-teller's arsenal of myth, thriller, folk-talk and sheer mastery of plot." The ability to fuse "myth, legend and modern styles," she maintained, was what made his latest novel "wise, exciting and essential, a powerful antidote to the cynical commentators from "overseas" who see nothing ever new out of Africa."<sup>136</sup>

The African response to the novel came from one of the important African writers, Nuruddin Farah. His review of the book surpassed the traditional elements of book reviews to a personal evaluation of Achebe himself. In his opinion, Achebe was "Africa's best novelist and craftsman, and one of the world's greatest, living or dead." *Anthills*, Farah wrote,

is as different a novel as each of Achebe's has been from one preceding it, or others that have come after it. But this latest is tidier, with a narrative structure that is earthy, and a language which on the whole, is spare, and a telling that is direct. .... Often the points in the novel are made in a roundabout way or else in a cryptic manner.... this is a charming novel, a book of metonyms, a rich treasure of transferred meanings... *Anthills of the Savannah* is a most engaging and hugely successful novel. There is a great deal of poetry in it, and the quality of the writing is charged with informedness, an awareness of high things and high thoughts. This is an outstanding novel by Africa's most accomplished writer. *Anthills* calls for a celebration.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> W. L. Webb, "Favourites Fail to Make Booker Short List," review of *Anthills of the Savannah*, by Achebe, *The Guardian*, 24 September 1987.

<sup>136</sup> Mary Hope, "African Tyrant", review of *Anthills of the Savannah*, by Achebe, *Financial Times*, 26 September 1987, p. XXII.

<sup>137</sup> Nuruddin Farah, "A Tale of tyranny," review of *Anthills of the Savannah*, by Achebe, *West Africa*, 21 September 1987, pp. 113-129.

The pleasure such reviews added to the excitement of Achebe's editors over the shortlisting of *Anthills* was enormous. Moreover, "[t]he sales [were] going tremendously well," as Helena Fraser wrote to Achebe.<sup>138</sup> The impact the Booker Prize had on the sales of the novel was evident and immediate: "in the week after the shortlist was announced we sold 3431 copies, and last week a further 1463. We will be crossing our fingers on the night of the 29<sup>th</sup>."<sup>139</sup>

That night, Achebe's novel, the first by a 'black' African to be shortlisted for the most important commonwealth literary prize, failed to convince the Booker's judges that it was the 'best novel in English' for 1987. The hopes had been high. Perhaps because Achebe's compatriot, Wole Soyinka, had won the Nobel Prize a year earlier, expectations were that 1987 was Achebe's year to win a widely acclaimed literary prize such as the Booker. Mike Esplen, the Managing Director of HEB, expressed his pleasure and pride to see the launching and the subsequent Booker shortlisting of *Anthills*, but moved to explain how "very frustrated [he was] that it didn't win the prize it so deserved."<sup>140</sup> Kaye Whiteman, writing in *West Africa*, thought that while it was a pity that *Anthills* did not win the prize, the shortlisting "was good exposure for a writer who has long deserved the recognition that has already been accorded him by his sales figures."<sup>141</sup> Achebe himself was "delighted that things have worked out well for [*Anthills*]."<sup>142</sup>

The publication of the hardback was only an auspicious beginning. For the author, his agent and publishers, it was simply an early test of the grounds. The early achievement

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<sup>138</sup> Helen Fraser, London, to Achebe, Nsukka, 15 October 1987, C. Achebe's Papers, b,MS Eng 1406, Folder,136, H. L, Harvard C. L., Harvard University. Helen Fraser had been working as an editor at Collins before she joined William Heinemann in October 1987.

<sup>139</sup> Helen Fraser, London, to Achebe, Nsukka, 15 October 1987, C. Achebe's Papers, b,MS Eng 1406, Folder, 136,H. L, Harvard C. L., Harvard University.

<sup>140</sup> Mike Esplen (HEB Director), London, to Achebe, Amherst, 11 December 1987, C. Achebe's Papers, b,MS Eng 1406, Folder, 133, H. L, Harvard C. L., Harvard University.

<sup>141</sup> Kaye Whiteman, "Achebe and the Masquerade", review of *Anthills of the Savannah*, by Achebe *West Africa*, 9 November 1987, pp. 2193-4.

<sup>142</sup> Achebe, Amherst, to Helen Fraser, London, 15 December 1987, C. Achebe's Papers, b,MS Eng 1406, Folder, 136, H. L, Harvard C. L., Harvard University.



of the hardback edition required from Achebe as “the direct producer of the work in its materiality” and his agent and publishers as “the producers of the meaning and the value of the work”<sup>143</sup> further collaborative efforts to enhance such a success. Plans for launching the paperback edition of *Anthills* were soon revealed. HEB (Nigerian) proposed to publish its AWS edition during spring,<sup>144</sup> while HEB (UK) “with the UK/European priced edition to follow in the autumn when Picador will also be launching their trade paperback edition.”<sup>145</sup> Other publishers were sure to follow suit.

The launches of various editions and translations of *Anthills* brought Achebe once again to the attention of the media, critics, academics, students, and general fiction readers. His presence was often sought by “the whole set of agents whose combined efforts produce consumers capable of knowing the work of art as such.”<sup>146</sup> Aware of this, Achebe was often eager to play his part in promoting his novel. For instance, Cappelen, a Norwegian publisher, who was to publish *Anthills* in October (1988) contacted David Bolt to enquire about the likelihood of Achebe’s presence at the launch of the Norwegian translation. They provided more than a reason for the author’s visit to Oslo: “The Norwegian PEN also expresses interest in hearing him speak at a member’s meeting.” They also suggested that Bolt should “get in touch with the other Scandinavian publishers in order to arrange an author’s tour.”<sup>147</sup> For Achebe as well as for other Scandinavian publishers, this tour was welcomed. They all scheduled a well coordinated timetable to coincide with the publication of the Danish and Norwegian translations. Achebe’s visit was also an occasion to attend other events. In Oslo, he took part in a symposium with Andre Brink as part of

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<sup>143</sup> Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, p. 37.

<sup>144</sup> HEB Nigeria were able to publish the novel in January 1989, three months after HEB (Kenya).

<sup>145</sup> Esplen (HEB Director), London, to Achebe, Amherst, 11 December 1987, C. Achebe’s Papers, b,MS Eng 1406, Folder,133, H. L, Harvard C. L., Harvard University.

<sup>146</sup> Bourdieu, *The field of Cultural Production*, p. 37.

<sup>147</sup> Aase Gjerdrum (Editor in Chief of Cappelen), letter to Bolt, 19 January 1988, C. Achebe’s Papers, b,MS Eng 1406, Folder, 135, H. L, Harvard C. L., Harvard University.

the Oslo Book Festival. In Sweden he met Academics, writers and journalists in the cities of Umea and Stockholm, though the Swedish translation appeared much later.

Hill, on his part, continued to promote Achebe's name during this period. At the turn of 1989, at the age of 77, Hill invited Achebe to "deliver the [PEN] Memorial Address at Writers' Day" on the 4<sup>th</sup> of March.<sup>148</sup> The letter did not elicit any response which induced Hill to send a telegram to Higo highlighting a range of activities in which Achebe was invited to take part.<sup>149</sup> Achebe who was then attending the launch of *Anthills* in Enugu (26<sup>th</sup> January 1989)<sup>150</sup> was simply out of reach. Yet for Hill, the matter was serious enough to cause worry. Achebe had agreed to appear on BBC for an interview, and Hill received continuous inquiries from the broadcasting company and from the PEN seeking confirmation of Achebe's presence. It was until Festus S. Ehinlaiye, from HEB (Nigeria), "put someone on the road to deliver [Hill's] messages to Chinua and come back with a reply",<sup>151</sup> that Achebe's confirmation finally arrived.<sup>152</sup> Hill worked indefatigably and launched a "barrage of proposed engagements" in the hope of making Achebe's visit a remarkable literary event. His schedule was busy enough and involved meeting Graham Green<sup>153</sup> and the TV and radio presenter, Melvyn Bragg, whom Hill had long wanted "to do an African literature programme on his prestigious TV South Bank Show."<sup>154</sup> In

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<sup>148</sup> Hill, London, to Achebe, Nsukka, 12 January 1989, C. Achebe's Papers, b,MS Eng 1406, Folder, 133, H. L., Harvard C. L., Harvard University.

<sup>149</sup> Hill, telex to Higo, 19 January, 1989, C. Achebe's Papers, b,MS Eng 1406, Folder, 134, H. L., Harvard C. L., Harvard University.

<sup>150</sup> Higo, telex to Hill, 26 January 1989, C. Achebe's Papers, b,MS Eng 1406, Folder, 134, H. L., Harvard C. L., Harvard University.

<sup>151</sup> Festus Ehinlaiye, telex to Hill, 27 January 1989, C. Achebe's Papers, b,MS Eng 1406, Folder, 134, H. L., Harvard C. L., Harvard University.

<sup>152</sup> Achebe, Ogidi, to Festus Ehinlaiye, Ibadan, 28 January 1989, C. Achebe's Papers, b,MS Eng 1406, Folder, 134, H. L., Harvard C. L., Harvard University. The letter contains the following words: "Chinua's dates in London will be March 3 to 7. Between now and then he can be reached through English Department, City College, New York. Please inform PEN my lecture is titled: 'African literature as Celebration'. Chinua is ready to stand for international Pen presidency."

<sup>153</sup> Hill says: "I am now contacting Graham Greene, with a view to arranging that you meet him, should he be in London at the time. This is quite a long shot as he lives most of the time in the South of France."



addition to a celebratory meeting with William Heinemann and HEB, Achebe was to give various press interviews on African Literature and his own work.<sup>155</sup> Achebe dutifully consented to take part in Hill's suggested activities and revelled in his role as the star of African letters. The media coverage also contributed to the success of his visit. The BBC broadcasted two interviews with Achebe. *The Guardian*, *The Independent* and *New Statesman* devoted pages to cover the proceedings of the event.

But this was not an exception. As a writer, Achebe was often solicited by various educational institutions, media companies, and cultural organisations throughout the five continents.<sup>156</sup> His publishers were behind many of these activities. They not only publicized Achebe's name and books directly as a mere technical publishing process that dictated mounting publicity campaigns before and after each publication date, but also facilitated his contact and meetings with a number of institutions. The records of Achebe housed at the Library of the University of Reading and at Houghton Library, Harvard University, reveal the services rendered to Achebe by Heinemann throughout the years of their cooperation.

As individuals and institution, Heinemann's endeavour to promote Achebe's image as the most important African novelist was as extraordinary as successful. In examining various publishing records of several African writers that were published in the AWS, one cannot fail to realise the privileged status bestowed on Achebe which no other African writer had ever received from HEB. Arguably such a treatment was not only dictated by the financial returns that HEB were making out of Achebe's books, but also by the personal relationship Achebe had built with his publishers -- a relationship which Achebe

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<sup>154</sup> Hill, London, to Achebe, New York 8 February 1989, C. Achebe's Papers, b,MS Eng 1406, Folder,133,H. L, Harvard C. L., Harvard University. See Telegram, by Hill toHigo.Folder, 134. Achebe was invited to the South Bank Show on January 1990 where he presented his topic, "African Literature as Restoration of celebration."

<sup>155</sup>Hill, London, to Achebe,New York, 22 February 1989, C. Achebe's Papers, b,MS Eng 1406, Folder,133, H. L, Harvard C. L., Harvard University.

<sup>156</sup> A reader of Achebe's biography by Ezenwa-Ohaeto would realise the abundant number of trips Achebe undertook during this period and invitations and awards that Achebe he accepted.

often evoked with a sense of pride and admiration. In 2007, Achebe won the Man Booker International Prize in honour of literary career. His son, Chidi, came to Oxford to receive the prize. In his acceptance speech, Chidi referred to a long tradition that shaped the connection between Achebe and HEB.

It's important here to talk about the link between Dad and the British publishing industry. A giant publisher, Alan Hill, who is deceased and James Currey, who is hopefully here somewhere, are two individuals who come to mind, who essentially opened the door for African writers to have a voice and Dad's work recurs with his mission to give a voice to the voiceless ....My hope is that this cherished and long relationship with the British, British academics, British institutions will continue far into the future.<sup>157</sup>

The long term relationship between Achebe and Heinemann is extraordinary. Heinemann remained Achebe's main publisher for over forty years. It provided him with a platform to take his message beyond Nigeria, and to "represent the African experience in a narrative that sought, self-consciously, to be different from the colonial novel." Whereas such a narrative served "as a model for a different kind of literature", Achebe served "as a model for other African writers"<sup>158</sup> who not only emulated him, but also sought to be published by the same publishers.

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<sup>157</sup> "Acceptance Speech by Chidi Achebe on behalf of Chinua Achebe," 28 June 2007  
<<http://www.themanbookerprize.com/prize/mbi-archive/winnersspeech2007>> (15 July 2007).

<sup>158</sup>-Gikandi, Introduction to *Things Fall Apart*, by Achebe (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1996), p. xvii.



## Chapter Four

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### *The Making of James Ngugi*

*Weep Not, Child* was [...] my first book and so everything dictates that I should remember all the detail surrounding its publication, but I do not. I do not even recall if there was a formal publication party. This is strange because *Weep Not, Child* is dear to my heart...<sup>1</sup>

#### -I-

In June 1962, shortly after the African Writers Series was launched, Ngugi made an important move towards international recognition. His first novel had just been accepted by the publishers of Heinemann Educational Books. For an obscure Kenyan writer like himself, this must have been a thrilling moment. Hitherto, he had five articles published in *The Sunday Post* (1961) and three in *The Sunday Nation* (1962). His creative writing amounted to a story entitled 'The Fig Tree', which appeared in print in the Makerere University magazine, *Penpoint* in December 1960, and 'The Wind' also published, three months later, in *Penpoint* and reprinted in *The Kenya Weekly News*, a European settlers' magazine based in Nairobi.

Such a modest beginning was not an isolated experience. In fact, a number of Ngugi's young African contemporaries had similar moments of uncertainty and expectation. Bernth Lindfors has explained that many of the writers who published their works with foreign publishers in the late 1950s and early 1960s had formerly been fostered by what he calls 'African little magazines'.<sup>2</sup> He maintains that such outlets, local and limited as they may have been, performed an important role in the development of Anglophone African writing. For Ngugi, who was still an undergraduate student at

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<sup>1</sup> Ngugi, *Writers in Politics* (Oxford: James Currey, 1997), pp. 83-4.

<sup>2</sup> See Lindfors, *Loaded Vehicles*, p. 43.

Makerere University, the two short stories were his passport to attend the 'Conference of African Writers of English Expression', which event had a positive impact on his literary career.

In retrospect, one cannot fail to note the influence which this assembly of writers has wielded over the years. Organised by Makerere Extra Mural Department and the Mbari Centre of Ibadan, and sponsored by the Congress for Cultural Freedom in Paris, the conference brought together 39 participants among them distinguished – albeit then little known – figures in African literature such as Achebe, J. P. Clark, Gabriel Okara, Christopher Okigbo, Wole Soyinka, Kofi Awoonor, Ezekiel Mphahlele and Lewis Nkosi. These prospective writers were joined by delegates from the West Indies and the United States, as well as magazine editors and representatives of British and American publishing houses, who took a special interest in African writing.<sup>3</sup>

The conference was not only an opportunity for African writers to present and read excerpts of their works, but also an occasion to debate and exchange views on issues related to African literature in English. For instance, amid the animated discussions about formulating a definition of African literature, there arose a dispute among the participants as to whether the term meant literature by Africans of diverse backgrounds, or whether it required particular qualities.<sup>4</sup> There was also a heated debate on the term 'Negritude', which ended in its rejection. Most fruitful of all was the exchange between African writers and foreign publishers, which involved the concerns of African writers as to the current publishing policies in relation to their writings outside Africa.

All this was clearly very stimulating for a young, aspiring African writer such as Ngugi. For one thing, he was able to meet Achebe. He had "a rough typescript of a novel

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, Robie Macauley, editor of the *Kenyon Review*, HEB's Milne, and Andre Deutsch's representative among others were looking around for the work of African writers. Robert Armstrong, the director of the Northwestern University Press was also present to arrange the distribution of some of Mbari Centre's publications in America.

<sup>4</sup> Achebe, "English and the African Writer," *Transition*, No. 18 (1965): pp. 27-30.



in progress, *Weep Not, Child*,” which he hoped Achebe could read.<sup>5</sup> For Ngugi, the “real importance of the conference [lay] not so much in the actual output or content,” as in the physical contact which the conference made possible. He could foresee, though “that writers from East Africa [would] rise.”<sup>6</sup> Was there anything then that warranted this early prophecy? The meeting he had with Achebe on the margins of the conference explains a part of this optimism that transcends the circumstances of the literary event. It was thanks to Hugh Dinwiddy,<sup>7</sup> the warden of Northcote Hall where the conference took place, that Ngugi was able to meet Achebe.<sup>8</sup> As General Editor of the newly established AWS and a published African novelist, Achebe had achieved considerable fame and authority. He had much to give to Ngugi by way of advice and moral support. He eventually recommended him to Milne, the overseas managing director of HEB, who, in turn, sought the permission of Hill in London for the publication of *Weep Not, Child*. “It happened like this”, Hill explains:

I was at a board meeting at our offices in Kingswood in Surrey and I had a telephone call from Van Milne in Makerere.... Van Milne phoned me up and said a young student at Makerere had shown to Achebe an almost finished manuscript of a novel he'd written. Achebe was very impressed with it and he'd shown it at once to Van Milne. Van Milne read it and told me over the telephone: “I think it's terrific, and I want your agreement to take on this book sight unseen.” And I said, “You've got it,” and went back to the meeting.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ngugi, *Decolonizing the Mind*, (London: James Currey, 1986) p, 5 .

<sup>6</sup> J. T. Ngugi, “A Kenyan at the Conference,” *Transition*, No. 5 (1962): p.7. The view that the summit allowed writers to meet for the first time is reiterated by many others than Ngugi. In proffering a reason for the conference, Achebe felt that “the most important reason was the need for us writers to get acquainted with one another.” See Achebe, “English and the African Writer,” p.5.

<sup>7</sup> Dwinddy started teaching at Makerere University College in 1956 and left in 1970 as Dean of the College. See Carol Sicherman, “Ngugi's Colonial Education: ‘The Subversion ... of the African Mind’,” *African Studies Review*, 38, No 3 (December, 1995): p. 22.

<sup>8</sup> There are different stories of how Ngugi came to meet Achebe during that conference. In his biography of Achebe, Azenwa-Ohaeto says that it was during a morning Achebe opened his room's door and “welcomed a young man who timidly claimed to be a student at Makerere.” This story is contradicted by Carol Sicherman who says it was through Dwinddy that Ngugi came to meet Achebe. See Carol Sicherman, “Ngugi's Colonial Education: ‘The Subversion...of the African Mind’,” *African Studies Review*, Vol. 38, No. 3, (Dec., 1995), pp. 11-41 My assumption is that Dwinddy, who was well acquainted with what Ngugi was writing, was able to introduce Ngugi to Achebe.

<sup>9</sup> Petersen and Rutherford, eds., *Chinua Achebe: A Celebration*, pp. 153-4.

By the 19<sup>th</sup> of July 1962, Ngugi had completed the writing of *Weep Not, Child* and sent the manuscript to Milne hoping for positive feedback.<sup>10</sup> Following Achebe's and Milne's suggestions, he had inserted several corrections and modified the contents of some passages in the original typescript. More significantly, he had softened the radical tone of his narration when controversial political issues were evoked as the following passages illustrate:

1- Why should her son have died in a *Hitler's war* to save the whiteman from his brother white man? How long would she continue sacrificing what was hers for *the British*? In her son Njoroge, she saw a hope. If he could get all the whiteman's learning, would Ngotho even work for Howlands and especially as the wife was reputed to be hard, *unsmiling ruthless*?<sup>11</sup>

2- Should he have died in a white man's war? She did not want to sacrifice what was hers to other people. If Njoroge could now get all the white man's learning, would Ngotho even work for Howlands and especially as the wife was reputed to be a hard woman?<sup>12</sup>

In the second passage, references to 'Hitler' and 'the British' are omitted. It is not clear whether Ngugi had been made aware of the particular sensitivity among the British, and not least the Jews, to the name of Hitler. Perhaps it should be recalled here that, incidentally, Heinemann itself was founded by a Jewish immigrant. Nor can it be stated with any degree of certainty that the conspicuous absence of the collective term, 'the British', in the second passage meant that Ngugi wished to be politically correct, rather than get entangled in unwarranted arguments with his British publishers and readers. These

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<sup>10</sup> Ngugi, Kampala, to Milne, London, 23 July 1962, HEB 4/11, Special Collections, University of Reading, Reading (Henceforth SP, Univ., R, Reading). The date given here, 19 July 1962 comes from the original typescript of the *Weep Not, Child* housed at the SOAS Library. See Ngugi, "Weep Not, child," p.144. Special collections, School of Oriental and African Studies Library, SOAS, MS 337273.

<sup>11</sup> Ngugi, "Weep Not, child," p.17. Special collections, School of Oriental and African Studies Library, SOAS, MS 337273. (Italics added) The manuscript which is of 144 pages was completed in Northcote Hall (Makerere University College) in 19 July 1962 and signed as Thiong'o Ngugi.

<sup>12</sup> Ngugi, "Weep Not, child," p. 24. Special collections, School of Oriental and African Studies Library, SOAS, MS 337273. This is a second manuscript typed by HEB and consists of 169 pages.



are mere conjectures, but the truth is that his ultimate modifications conveyed a more convincing portrayal of the mindset of an illiterate African woman mourning her son.

Despite these multiple alterations, Milne, in a letter dated 13 August 1962, could not help showing some concern about the quality of Ngugi's work, noting that although "the writing is very promising", the novel as "it stands is not quite up to the standard for the African Writers Series." He assured Ngugi in a spirit of confidentiality that the modifications made were sensible but not entirely satisfactory.<sup>13</sup> Eventually, and as a gesture of encouragement, he decided to draw up a contract for *Weep Not, Child* to be published in the Series in November 1962. His condition was that Ngugi should undertake further editorial corrections. The terms of the contract signed by Ngugi were 'standard', and did not differ from those which were offered to Achebe and Ekwensi.<sup>14</sup>

While he was able to send Ngugi a copy of the contract, Milne was apparently too busy to suggest to him the specific alterations that were expected. The reason that Milne cited was his impending departure from HEB to rejoin Nelson, a publishing house he had worked for before he moved to Heinemann in 1959. Apparently, Milne wanted to go back to Nelson to continue the job which formed his main interest, namely textbook publishing. This had proved to be a very difficult task during Milne's three-year period of work for Heinemann. He could not produce textbooks over such a short period since, as Sambrook explained, "[textbooks] may take several years to produce and several more years to move the old book from the existing textbooks pile."<sup>15</sup>

Two months after he replaced Milne, Sambrook wrote to Ngugi and made several suggestions. The tone of his letter, dated the 12<sup>th</sup> March 1963, reflects a welcoming and constructive approach which would prevail in his correspondence with the author for some

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<sup>13</sup> Milne, London, to Ngugi, Kampala, 13 August 1962, HEB 4/11, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>14</sup> Milne, London, to Ngugi, Kampala, 21 November, 1962, HEB 4/1, SC, Uni., of R, Reading. The Terms implied 7 ½ Royalty of published priced on all copies sold.

<sup>15</sup> Sambrook, Interview by Gail Low, 6 February 2004 (Unpublished interview obtained from Dr. Low in December 2005).

years to come. “I should first like to say how much I enjoyed it [the manuscript of *Weep Not, Child*]”, he begins, “and what a pleasure it will be to publish”.<sup>16</sup> This clearly conveys a much warmer personal view of Ngugi’s manuscript than the tone adopted by Milne, who often used the official nominative singular pronoun. It is curious to compare Ngugi’s replies to both of his consecutive editors. While those addressed to Milne were short, typed, and formal in style, his letters to Sambrook, now in small cursive handwriting, were marked by their length, spontaneity and forwardness.

Although suggesting alterations in a writer’s manuscript is a delicate issue for any editor, Sambrook’s letter to Ngugi made the matter look as an act of professional advice rather than a set of imposed instructions, or a ‘proviso’ for publishing the novel.<sup>17</sup>

Sambrook’s editorial remarks on the manuscript, however, were limited to the first two chapters. The observations he made were meant to point out the type of alterations Ngugi needed to consider while revising his entire manuscript. They were sharp and focused, and reflected a sensitive attention to the creative integrity of Ngugi’s writing. Where a straying comment or an overemphasised statement or even an inadequate expression seemed to override the poetic effect of the narrative, Sambrook suggested a practical remedy.

Consider the following comments:

Page 17- First comment of any substance: The paragraph beginning ‘After three weeks’ on page 16 makes very clear why Nyokabi does not want Njoroge to play with Mwihaki. Thus the end of the paragraph beginning ‘Social antagonism...’ seems to me unnecessary, reading rather like a commentator’s ‘gloss’ on something which has already been supremely well done.

Page 14- Line 19: ‘in his bitter philosophy’ – this seems a little out of place for Njoroge. This conversation is looked at from the boy’s point of view and it seems to me that what is important is that, although he could not follow Kamau, he pitied him without being able to

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<sup>16</sup> Sambrook, London, to Ngugi, Kampala, 12 March 1963, HEB 4/11, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>17</sup> Sambrook seems to have anticipated a negative reaction to his suggestions, which explains the friendly tone he used from the start. In this letter he thanked Ngugi “for taking my suggestions so calmly. We’ll now complete our editorial reading of the remaining chapters and send them to you for approval.” Milne, in one of his letters to Ngugi, said: “the only proviso in accepting this title is that you help with editorial corrections.” See Milne’s letter to Ngugi, 2 October 1962, HEB 4/11.



rationalise his feeling. The reader realises Kamau is bitter from what he says.<sup>18</sup>

In an apologetic tone, Sambrook noted in the same letter that “[m]y comments look a bit ‘clinical’ on paper, but they are the result of reading your book with great enjoyment and enthusiasm and my feeling that this is so good that we should publish it with the greatest care.”<sup>19</sup> These shrewd comments and the amiable tone in which they were conveyed had an altogether energizing impact on Ngugi. Not only did he appreciate Sambrook’s recommendations and was willing to follow them, he was also confident enough to put forward his other unpublished works: *The Black Hermit*, *The Black Messiah*, and two one-act plays. As he conceived it then, Ngugi had the following words to say about *The Black Hermit*:

This was a 3 Act-play which I wrote last year and was successfully performed at the Uganda National Theatre in November. It was the first full length play by an East African in English, to get public performance. The reviews appearing in *The Makererean*, *The Ugandan Argus*, *The East African Standard*, were all favourable and consequently, I’ve received a number of letters from schools in both Kenya and Uganda, who want to get the published copies of the play.... I got offers of publication from some Oxford and London presses and I said I would first consult you.<sup>20</sup>

While trying to impress Sambrook by naming HEB as his favourite publisher and wishing to “cooperate and work well” with Sambrook, Ngugi did not miss the opportunity to raise the question of an advance royalty for *Weep Not, Child*, a subject he had deferred during his correspondence with Milne. Now he felt it was time he put across the issue to Sambrook in plain terms. It was not an easy task “trying to put in order what I have

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<sup>18</sup> Sambrook, London, to Ngugi, Kampala, 12 March 1963, HEB 4/11, SC, Uni., of R, Reading. The sentence that Sambrook referred to above comes as follows: “Social antagonism and separation in Mahua is not a one-way process. If the upper [class] did not want their sons and daughters to associate with the lower, even the lower did not want their sons and daughters to come into close contact with the upper. They might contract pride and wastefulness and forget their lowly position, which should otherwise work as an incentive to better their positions.” Ngugi, “Weep Not, child,” p.14. Special collections, School of Oriental and African Studies Library, SOAS, MS 337273.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ngugi, Kampala, to Sambrook, London, 17 March 1963, HEB 4/11, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

already written” under such “extremely difficult financial circumstances”.<sup>21</sup> An advance royalty of £75 was, therefore, paid to Ngugi on 29 March 1963 to help him during his three-month vacation (starting on the first of April) with the task of not only revising *Weep Not, Child*, but also *The Black Messiah* which HEB agreed to publish in the African Writers Series.<sup>22</sup>

*The Black Messiah* had, in fact, been written much earlier and submitted for the competition organised by the East African Literature Bureau (EALB). Although the novel won the EALB prize worth £50, it somehow failed to see its way to print.<sup>23</sup> One explanation comes from the HEB’s archives. Ngugi, it seems, was not satisfied with this early novel because “it has even more faults than *Weep Not, Child*”.<sup>24</sup> His dissatisfaction, one can only guess, may have been caused by the comments of the East African Creative Writing Committee. It was noted that:

- Vocabulary [is] Limited but adequate and well handled.
- It is a natural, individual style: and it is ‘Normal’ English.
- More narrative than dialogue, but variation adequate.
- Individual feelings about social problems
- A curious sense of ambivalence pervades the whole book, even though there is no doubt about who are the ‘good chaps’ and who the bad.
- Stylistically, it needs but little editorial tidying up.
- With a less abrupt ending, or rather, with an ending that looks less like sheer desperation, it would certainly be worth publishing. In any event it deserves a prize even as it stands.<sup>25</sup>

There were further reasons why *The Black Messiah* remained in its manuscript form. It must be noted that before leaving HEB, Milne had been acquainted with Ngugi’s novel.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Sambrook, London, to Ngugi, Kampala, 29 March 1963, HEB 4/11, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>23</sup> Reinhard Sander and Bernth Lindfors, eds., *Ngugi wa Thiong’o Speaks: Interviews with the Kenyan Writer* (Oxford: James Currey Publishers, 2006), p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> Ngugi, Nairobi, to Sambrook, London, 17<sup>th</sup> November 1963, HEB 4/4, SC, Uni., of R, Reading. See also *Ngugi wa Thiong’o Speaks*, p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> See Report on *The Black Messiah* by J.C. Sharman’s from the East African Creative Writing Committee, HEB 4/11, SC, Uni., of R, Reading. The Report is printed on an East African Literature Bureau headed paper.



He had been involved with the publishing activities of the EALB, and had a fair idea about the creative writing produced there.<sup>26</sup> However, the fact that the Committee took a year to decide which book should get the prize, gave chance to Milne to see *Weep Not, Child* first and accept it, in principle, for publication.<sup>27</sup> This promising turn of events, however, served to delay the immediate publication of *The Black Messiah*, despite the late committee's favourable view.

One must also point out the role Charles Richards played in the promotion of African literature in East Africa. Richards had run the EALB between 1948 and 1963, and made it possible for British publishing houses such as Longman and OUP to set up offices in East Africa and publish prospective African books like *The Black Messiah*. He had recommended several texts for publication in the said houses and was prone to criticism as to what the rationale behind his collaboration with these publishing houses was. J.W. Chege, for instance, has argued that by doing this the EALB was providing a solid basis for the consolidation of the business of these foreign publishers in East Africa. The EALB seemed to take the pain and risk to hunt for quality writing and then hand it over to these commercial publishers who consequently "did not have to spend their money on marketing research, or sales promotion [since] the risks were borne by the Bureau which could only afford to do this at the expense of the East African tax-payer."<sup>28</sup> Notwithstanding the controversial aspects of this symbiotic relation between African writers and British publishers, the rise of Ngugi as Kenya's foremost writer is the direct outcome of this longstanding association.

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<sup>26</sup> Charles Richards, Nairobi, to Hill, London, 21 February 1963, HEB 4/4, SC, Uni., of R, Reading. He wrote to Hill explaining that the Milne had hoped to publish *The Black Messiah* since he had been "working with us [EALB] on the publication of books arising from the work of the E. A. Creative Writing Committee."

<sup>27</sup> Milne, London, to Ngugi, Kampala, 13 November 1962, HEB 4/11, SC, Uni., of R, Reading. Milne wrote the following: "I have just heard from Mr. Richards that *The Black Messiah* has been awarded a prize of 500/- [Kenyan Shillings/ £50 British Pound] in the competition. I hope that you will not mind making a few alterations to it so that we can publish it also."

<sup>28</sup> John Waruinigi Chege, *Copyright Law and Publishing in Kenya* (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1978), pp. 130-31.

Until October 1963, when *Weep Not, Child* reached the page proof stage, Ngugi had been hard at work on the manuscript. He went methodically through the prelims and the proofs, objected to inserting 'illustrations' in the book<sup>29</sup> and announced that he wanted to be published "under James Ngugi and not as Thiong'o Ngugi."<sup>30</sup> Early in December he received a formal letter from Sambrook inviting him to sign a contract that covered the terms proposed for a hardback edition of *Weep Not, Child* with the offer of 10 ½ % as a royalty.<sup>31</sup> Knowing that "no firm ha[d] so far succeeded consistently in marketing successfully long-run low-priced novels or general books in paper covers unless they ha[d] first issued in hardcover,"<sup>32</sup> HEB, eventually, proposed to William Heinemann to undertake the publishing of a hardback edition for an up-and-coming writer named Ngugi.<sup>33</sup> William Heinemann had the right sales organisations and was better at eliciting reviews than the recently established HEB.

The deal, therefore, was based on making the best publishing and marketing arrangements for *Weep Not, Child*. To maximise their sales of the book, William Heinemann proposed an interval of three months before the paperback edition should appear in print. Consequently 2200 hardback copies were published and saw their way to the market. This was certainly an ambitious figure given the publishing conditions of the sixties. For William Heinemann, the decision to publish Ngugi's novel was due to the fact that Ngugi was a talented writer. The publishers perhaps anticipated a success akin to that they had with Achebe some years earlier. On the other hand, Achebe who had secured

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<sup>29</sup> Ngugi, letter to Sambrook, 18 November 1963, HEB 4/11. Ngugi says: "I have just finished correcting the proofs of *Weep Not, Child*. I very much love that there will be No illustrations in the novel."

<sup>30</sup> Ngugi, letter to Sambrook, 21 August 1963, HEB 4/11. At the end of the original typescript of *Weep Not, Child*, Ngugi mentioned the place and the date in which he completed the writing of his manuscript, signing his name as Thiong'o Ngugi.

<sup>31</sup> Sambrook, to Ngugi, 2 December 1963, HEB 4/11, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>32</sup> Clive Bingley, *The Business of Book Publishing*, (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1972), p 26, quoted in J.A. Sutherland, *Fiction and the Fiction Industry*, (London: The Athlone Press, 1978), 166.

<sup>33</sup> William Heinemann was only one of a number of hardback imprints under the Heinemann group. There were others who were specialised in hardcover and fiction like Secker and Warburg.



himself a place within HEB and had a considerable influence over the publishing policies of AWS also supported the idea of a hardback edition of *Weep Not, Child*, not simply to ensure its success, but to powerfully launch Ngugi as a new African writer.

By the time the agreement was signed for the trade edition by the author, William Heinemann had arranged for a design of the jacket and had written a blurb for the front flap. It then scheduled the publication of *Weep Not, Child* for the fourth of May with the aim of increasing sales in countries in and outside Africa.<sup>34</sup> While Sambrook was hoping for the hardcover edition to appear as early as February, William Heinemann felt that the intended delay would give them time “to write to their trade contacts in these countries and to receive advance orders”. Moreover, an interval was needed “for copies to be in bookshops by the time term begins and it would give the local trade a chance to display advance copies, publicity posters, bookshop streamers” which both HEB and William Heinemann were preparing.<sup>35</sup>

Unlike the circumspect attitude of William Heinemann as to the publishing of the hardcover edition of *Weep Not, Child*, the enthusiasm of HEB was such that they planned 10,000 copies in the AWS edition. Printed by a company in London called Bookprint Limited, the AWS edition of *Weep Not, Child* came out in 160 pages including 6 pages as prelims and 4 blank making 1 endpaper, composed in 11/12 pt Mono Garamond and in trimmed page size 7 ¼ x 4 7/8. Arrangements were made to guarantee good publicity for the ‘first’ novel. Copies of the hardback edition were to reach bookshops in East Africa by mid June. Review copies were also dispatched to local reviewers; streamers and photographs were posted to the most important bookshops, and a launch party was organised by Ezekiel Mphahlele in collaboration with the ESA Bookshop. In London, reviews were expected by the first week of May; the paperback edition was to be brought out in Autumn, after the main sales of the hard-cover were over.

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<sup>34</sup> Heinemann was also preparing to promote the book in East Africa by shipping copies to bookshops that had made orders.

<sup>35</sup> Sambrook, London, to Ngugi, Kampala, 16 January 1964, HEB 4/11, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

The fact that it was the ‘first’ novel by a Kenyan writer attracted substantial attention from the mainstream newspapers and magazines. John Coleman of the *Observer*, praising the style and themes of the novel, had nonetheless particular qualms about the denouement: “What Mr Ngugi isn’t fully up to”, he wrote, “is his conclusion, where the beset boy fails to hang himself and damns himself for a coward.”<sup>36</sup> In turn, Gbolahan Alatishe from the BBC observed that the novel achieves balance through a narrative that “has sympathy and understanding, but not sentimentality.”<sup>37</sup> He further explains that this balance is attained because the writer, without bitterness, takes a look at the people the Mau Mau fought – Europeans, Indians, and Africans. He concludes his review by stating that *Weep Not, Child* “is the best novel written by a British African.”<sup>38</sup> Robert Nye from *The Guardian* admires the plain and businesslike style of the novel which makes the characters “living and actual” and the story of Njoroge’s continuous confused involvement in the Mau Mau “strong in episodes that burn themselves on the memory”.<sup>39</sup> In the same vein, a review appearing in *West Africa* relates the success of Ngugi to his ability to “convincingly reveal the human sufferings involved in political clashes,” to catch “the flavour of happy family” and to vividly convey “the terror of human degradation and brutality.”<sup>40</sup> The same reception of the novel was to be seen in Africa. For instance, *The Kenya Educational Journal* found *Weep Not, Child* surprising in the sense that “it is a first novel by a talented Kenya writer, and a good one”, and that “it should be in every school library.”<sup>41</sup>

Such was the enthusiasm for the novel that, by 11 September 1964, the number of sold copies of the hardback edition reached 1651 out of the 2200, of which 785 were sold

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<sup>36</sup> John Coleman, Review of *Weep Not, Child*, by Ngugi, *The Observer*, 3 May 1964.

<sup>37</sup> Gbolahan Alatishe review of *Weep Not, Child* for “A BOOK OF TODAY”, BBC, Thursday, 7 May, 1964.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Robert Nye, Review of *Weep Not, Child*, by Ngugi, *The Guardian*, 8 May 1964.

<sup>40</sup> Review of *Weep Not, Child*, by James Ngugi, *West Africa*, 24<sup>th</sup> October 1964.

<sup>41</sup> W.G.B, Review of *Weep Not, Child*, by Ngugi, *Kenya Educational Journal*, September 1964.



in Britain and 866 in Africa.<sup>42</sup> The sales of AWS paper edition of the novel, once published on the first week of November 1964, were far beyond expectation that within two years the entire 10,000 copies were sold out. These remarkable sales figures were made possible in the case of Africa by the programming of the novel for schools in both East and West Africa. This success prompted Sambrook to write to both West and East African Exam Councils asking them for copies of examination papers which had been set in 1964 and 1965 in the English language and literature.<sup>43</sup> The aim was to produce a new edition that would accommodate the needs of students in both parts of Africa.

Consequently in February 1966, a 'School Edition' of *Weep Not, Child* was introduced. The Nigerian Ime Ikiddeh, a friend and contemporary of Ngugi at Leeds University, was invited by Sambrook to write an introduction for the novel. The idea seems to be modelled on the success of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* for which HEB had issued a school edition with an introduction by Higo. A printing and binding order of 15,000 copies was issued to satisfy the demands of the African educational market. In a letter to John Seddon, the Managing Director of Cox and Wyman Ltd, to whom the printing of the 'School Edition' of *Weep Not, Child* was assigned, Sambrook explained that the book "is now, of course, extremely urgent as far as we are concerned. I can only ask you to give us the very earliest possible date and be indulgent, as we have several thousand orders to supply."<sup>44</sup> By mid October, HEB, running out of time and overwhelmed by massive and urgent orders, had to rely on two printers for delivering the reprint of *Weep Not, Child*. Knowing that the 'bulk delivery' of the School Edition from Cox and Wyman Ltd was to arrive early in January 1967, Sambrook sought the possibility of Bookprint Ltd supplying

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<sup>42</sup> See the Publishing Proposal of *The River Between* which includes a section on Relevant Sales History of *Weep Not, Child*, HEB 4/4, SC, Uni., of R, Reading. See also a letter from Sambrook to Ngugi, 21 August 1964, HEB 4/11. In updating Ngugi, Sambrook mentioned the following: "The hard-cover has done very well for a first novel. We did 2,000 copies and we have sold over 1600."

<sup>43</sup> Sambrook, letter to West African Exam Council, 4 March 1966, HEB 4/1, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>44</sup> Sambrook, London, to John Seddon, London, 13 October 1966, HEB 4/11, , SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

5,000 copies of the normal AWS edition so as to cover total orders from Nigeria (10,500), Ghana (2000), Kenya (3,500) and Tanzania (1,500).<sup>45</sup>

Meanwhile, *The Black Messiah*, now renamed *The River Between*, had been revised by Ngugi and sent to London. When it reached Sambrook, he had it forwarded to David Michie, the Editorial Manager of William Heinemann, who took the decision to publish the hardback edition of the book. It was duly edited and found its way to publication. Unlike *Weep Not, Child*, the new novel did not require elaborate editorial work. During their meeting in Nigeria at the end of April 1964, Sambrook and Achebe made a number of alterations and agreed “that to save time it would be best to start production as soon as possible”<sup>46</sup> In a letter addressed to Ngugi, Sambrook explained:

I didn't sent the manuscript back to you because the alterations were really so small that it wasn't worth while. As I think I said, I didn't make any alterations to the structure of the novel either in the development of the narrative or the style. The alterations I did make were purely within paragraphs and sentences – the linking of perhaps two sentences into one, changing punctuation here and there, substituting a pronoun for a proper noun when there was danger of your repeating it too often, and so on.<sup>47</sup>

Although this was meant to speed up the process of publishing *The River Between*, Ngugi was discreet enough to go through the proofs and make considerable corrections which he deemed were necessary. These include changing paragraphs within the original text and cutting out some of the phrases or sentences because they “were vague, redundant, or

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<sup>45</sup> Sambrook, Memorandum to Tony Beal and Richard Gale, 14 October 1966, HEB 4/11, SC, Uni., of R, Reading. *Weep Not, Child*'s success was notable in different ways. An American edition with an introduction by Martin Tucker was issued in 1969 by Collier Books. Reprinted several times in its African Writers Series not to mention other editions and translations as the book went on establishing itself as the 'first' east African novel. Extracts from the novel were often reprinted in anthologies focusing on African literature such as Paul Edwards' *Through African Eyes* and *Modern African Narrative*, Eldred Jones' *Adjustments*, Ime Ikiddeh's *Drumbeats*, and John Perry's *Africa Speaks*. This is not to mention a number of translations that the novel has undergone such as Russian (1967), German (1986), Hungarian (1971), Kiswahili (1971), Polish (1972), Italian (1974), Serbo-Croat (1979), Portuguese (1980), Uzbek (1981), Swedish (1981), French (1983), and Japanese (1988).

<sup>46</sup> Sambrook, London, to Ngugi, Nairobi, 27 April 1964, HEB 4/11, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>47</sup> Sambrook, London, to Ngugi, Nairobi, 21 August 1964, HEB 4/1, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.



unnecessarily emotional.”<sup>48</sup> Ngugi, however, had to apologise to Sambrook for making these heavy corrections which were not expected at a time when the printer was supposed to start production. In the letter he joined to the proofs, he wrote that he hoped “no other novel will give as much headache as *The River Between* has given me over the last three years. The trouble is that it never improves since it has a big structural weakness at the middle.”<sup>49</sup> Sambrook, on his part, consented to Ngugi’s heavy corrections. He had concealed from Ngugi the numerous editorial corrections he and Achebe made in the novel, and was confident that the latter would neither object to them nor make additional changes. By the time the proofs were returned to the printer on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November, Ngugi received £100 from William Heinemann for the publishing of 2500 hardback edition copies.

*The River Between* appeared in its hardcover edition three months after the publication of the AWS edition of *Weep Not, Child*. A small ceremony to launch its publication was held at the University of Leeds on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 1965. Hill sent invitations on behalf of the directors of William Heinemann to numerous individuals including academics like Andrew N. Jeffares, W. D.B Grant, T. F. Mitchell, Frank Kermode, Arthur Ravenscroft; graduate students such as Peter Nazareth and Ime Ikiddeh; booksellers like Olaf Arnold (Arnolds), B. Jackson (Walkers), F. Batchelor (Wilsons), and J.W. Horwell (W.H.Smith); and Journalists such as W.T. Oliver (*Yorkshire Post*) Robert Nye (*The Guardian*), Graham Miller and Alfred Bradley (BBC).

A week later, reviews started to appear in British newspapers. Most of them took a particular interest in the style and the themes of the novel. *The Times Literary Supplement* devoted a whole column to the novel stating that “it has rare qualities of restraint, intelligence and sensitivity.” Titled as ‘African Moderate’, the review goes into raptures over how the novel translates “native African qualities of pride and nobility into terms that

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<sup>48</sup> Ngugi, Leeds, to Verity, London, 29 October 1964, HEB 4/4, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>49</sup> Ngugi, Leeds, to Sambrook, London, 30 October 1964, HEB 4/4, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

the urban European reader can understand.”<sup>50</sup> Christopher Wordsworth, from *The Guardian*, reiterated a similar view saying that “there is that rarity an almost wordless love story that avoids pseudo-nobility while remaining proudly and distinctively African.”<sup>51</sup> The *Reporter* found the author’s narrative style fascinating “which is essentially African, and [sic] captures the spirit and outlook of his people.”<sup>52</sup> Other reviews focused on the themes of the book. *The Yorkshire Post*, for instance, found Ngugi’s ‘poignant story’ of the clash between tribal tradition and European custom “clear, simple and moving” because the writer was able to handle “his opposing groups skilfully and make us understand what the disputed initiation rite [female circumcision] means to both sides.”<sup>53</sup> In turn, *African Affairs* described *The River Between* as “a sad and moving story without the conventional happy ending, but it is one which could be repeated elsewhere in a changing Africa.”<sup>54</sup> In his appraisal of the novel, M.M. Carlin from *Transition* observed that it “really needs to be reviewed by an interracial symposium of theologians, psychologists, anthropologists, doctors, and literary critics – few of whom would communicate with each other very well!”<sup>55</sup>

In spite of these favourable reviews, *The River Between* featured in AWS paperback edition only after the lapse of eleven months on the appearance of hard copies in print. When the AWS edition finally came out on 26<sup>th</sup> December 1965, the number did not exceed 7500 copies. There is no explanation in the HEB archives at the University of Reading for such an interval between the two publications. One might interpret this as part

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<sup>50</sup> Piers Paul Read, ‘African Moderate’ Review of *The River Between*, by Ngugi, *The Times Literary Supplement* 3283 (28 January 1965): p. 61.

<sup>51</sup> Christopher Wordsworth, Review of *The River Between*, by Ngugi, *The Guardian*, 29 January 1965.

<sup>52</sup> Changing Kikuyuland, Review of *The River Between*, by Ngugi, *Reporter*, 26 February 1965.

<sup>53</sup> Phyllis Bentley, Egg-Head Reflects: Review of *The River Between*, by Ngugi, *Yorkshire Post*, 4 February 1965.

<sup>54</sup> Review of *The River Between*, by Ngugi, *African Affairs*, Vol. 64, N. 257 (Oct., 1965): 314 – 315.

<sup>55</sup> M.M. Carlin, “The Second Novel”, Review of *The River Between*, by Ngugi, *Transition*, N. 19 (1965): 52-53.



of a conventional procedure to allow a time gap between publications of books by the same author, a lapse that would give a chance, in the case of Ngugi, to sell more copies of both the hardback edition of *The River Between* and the AWS paperback edition of *Weep Not, Child*, and simultaneously build what Currey calls “a natural publishing rhythm,” a chronological profile of his publishing history.<sup>56</sup> This explanation may also be inferred from a letter that Sambrook wrote to Ngugi after receiving an extract from a manuscript, *Wrestling with God*, which later became *A Grain of Wheat*, telling him that the novel “ought to appear in a year to fifteen months.”<sup>57</sup> Whether the “next book” should appear within a year from the publication of *The River Between* or from the time the letter was written is not clear. However, apart from the visible constructive encouragement to remain productive, there is a clear emphasis on the part of the publisher on the time sequence in which works by a writer should appear.

During the period span separating the two publications, Ngugi was preoccupied with other affairs. At the end of the second term, Arthur Ravenscroft, who was heading the MA programme and “teaching the course on the use of English found Ngugi’s creative use of language brilliant and at the end of one term recommended that he should move straight to the two-year MA course by research.”<sup>58</sup> Having been exposed enough to writings from the West Indies, Ngugi chose to work in the field of Caribbean literature. Professor Douglas Grant was appointed to supervise his dissertation on the fiction of George Lamming’ and other West Indian authors.<sup>59</sup>

Along with his reading in West Indian literature, Ngugi started reviewing potential manuscripts for HEB such as Mugo Gatheru’s *The Moulding of the New Kenya*, Asalache’s

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<sup>56</sup> The phrase conveys a ‘technical’ term used in the publishing industry. Prof. Robert Fraser advised its use.

<sup>57</sup> Sambrook, London, to Ngugi, Leeds, 30 April 1965, HEB 4/4, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>58</sup> David Cook and Michael Okenimpe, *Ngugi wa Thiong’o: An Exploration of his Writings*, (Oxford and Nairobi: James Currey and EALB, 1997), 5.

<sup>59</sup> See Carlo Sicherman, “Ngugi’s Colonial Education,” p. 6.

*a Calabash of Life*;<sup>60</sup> advised Ime Ikiddeh on his anthology *Drumbeats: An Anthology of African Narrative Prose*; and worked as assistant editor of *Africa: Transition and Change*, a university magazine published by African students' group at Leeds and edited by Ime Ikiddeh. However, "Ngugi's main preoccupation was with the writing of *A Grain of Wheat*. He wrestled with its structure. He took his time, and worked and reworked the material."<sup>61</sup> This was to be his 'most' important and influential work which was developing gradually as he became susceptible to various cultural, literary, and political influences.

His stay in Leeds was an occasion for him to learn about literatures extending beyond European traditions, and become familiar with remarkable socialist and anti-imperialist intellectuals such as Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Tolstoy, Gorky, Brecht, Frantz Fanon and others like them. Moreover contact with some prominent British socialist academics, including his tutor, Dr Arnold Kettle, widened his understanding of 'the problems of colonialism, neo-colonialism, and imperialism'<sup>62</sup>, and equipped him with "an ideological framework for opinions that he already vaguely held."<sup>63</sup> Given the multicultural and liberal ambience characteristic of British universities such as Leeds, Ngugi had every chance to develop a vision of the type of writer he wanted to be. His next novel, *A Grain of Wheat* had evolved amid these multiple influences and signalled a new turn in his writing career.

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<sup>60</sup> *A Calabash of Life* was not published by HEB. Longman was its publisher. In his report on the book, Ngugi found the novel very disappointing because "the story is thin; the plot is thin. Both are a thin thread to give the author a chance to describe village life. What the novel lacks (or what the author is not clear about) is a basic conflict – a theme that would help to control his narrative and organise the various scenes into an organic whole" See Ngugi, Leeds, to Sambrook, London, 11 November 1964, HEB 4/11, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>61</sup> David Cook and Michael Okenimkpe, *Ngugi wa Thiong'o: An Exploration of his Writing*, p 7.

<sup>62</sup> See Sicherman, "Ngugi's Colonial Education," pp. 20-26.

<sup>63</sup> Ime Ikiddeh, Foreword to *Homecoming* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o (London: Heinemann, 1972), p. viii.



## -II-

In *Moving the Centre*, Ngugi recalls the coming into being of his novel, *A Grain of Wheat* in the following terms:

Sometime in 1965 I handed a piece of prose to Professor Arthur Ravenscroft in what was a class exercise in language use. It was a description of a carpenter-artist at work on wood. Later this became part of a larger evocation of life in a village in colonial Kenya between the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the Mau Mau armed struggle against British rule in 1952. When in 1966 I attended the first conference of Scandinavian and African writers in Stockholm, I presented it under the title, *Memories of Childhood*. By then it had become part of an even larger enterprise, a novel, *A Grain of Wheat*, which I wrote during my time in Leeds. The novel came out in 1967.<sup>64</sup>

This cursory account of the development of the novel from a mere classroom assignment into a full-length fictional narrative hardly gives due acknowledgement to the writing process which otherwise was long and arduous. There are plenty of details about the circumstances of the writing and publication of the novel in the archives of HEB. Ngugi's correspondence with HEB editors clearly indicates that the idea of the novel itself had occurred to him prior to his trip to England in September 1964. As early as April 1964, Ngugi had confessed to Sambrook that he was toying with the idea of a new novel which, he assured, "will be the most challenging thing I have done so far".<sup>65</sup> By November, his initial thoughts had crystallized into the first ten pages. He had formulated the main theme of his novel which, temporarily, he entitled *Wrestling with God*. The book, he wrote to Sambrook, "[will] be about Post-Emergency Kenya"<sup>66</sup>, immersed as its predecessors were in local politics. Another letter to Sambrook dated 22 April, 1965 intimates that, save some difficulty experienced with the temporal framework of the novel restricted in ten days, the writing process went smoothly enough that he [Ngugi] felt he was halfway to its

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<sup>64</sup> Ngugi, *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (London and Nairobi: James Currey and EAEP, 1993), p. 2.

<sup>65</sup> Ngugi, Nairobi, to Sambrook, London, 17 April 1964, HEB 4/11, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

completion, and even promised to “finish the first draft by the end of the term”.<sup>67</sup> Aside from “the small extract” he sent to Sambrook, Ngugi had a section published in *Africa: Tradition and Change* under the title of ‘The Trench’.

Eventually in mid December 1965, a completed draft was submitted to HEB. While the customary publishing preparations were being undertaken by Sambrook and Judith Verity,<sup>68</sup> Ngugi had enough time on his hands to revise the manuscript “quite thoroughly”.<sup>69</sup> The revision that he actually made, however, was of a decorative nature and involved the rewriting of numerous passages and deletion of others which seem not to convey or corroborate the effects desired. These rhetorical and stylistic modifications can be identified through a comparison between the two original typescripts existing in the SOAS library.<sup>70</sup> Reading the two manuscripts, one fails to note any significant difference in terms of plot or characters. Ngugi maintained the structure of the narrative and exerted himself in the embellishment of descriptive and narrative style. The effort spent on this activity was either so tedious or strenuous that when he sent the manuscript to Verity early in May, Ngugi made it clear that: “I’ve now finished working on *A Grain of Wheat*. I don’t propose to do much more work on it (at least not for the time being). I would like to get it out of my hands as soon as possible so that I can start work on other things.”<sup>71</sup>

A month later, a contract was drawn up for *A Grain of Wheat* as the novel now was formally entitled. The terms were the usual 10% of published price of the hardcover on sales in UK and “elsewhere”, and 7 ½ % of published price on all sales of the paperback, including an advance of £200 paid to the author half on signature and half on publication

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<sup>67</sup> Ngugi, Leeds, to Sambrook, London, 22 April 1965, HEB5/6, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>68</sup> Verity was the assistant of Sambrook. Because of Sambrook’s move to take care of building overseas branches, Verity was to be the editor of Ngugi and responsible for *A Grain of Wheat*. She left HEB by the end of 1966. Shortly After, Currey came to take over the AWS.

<sup>69</sup> Sambrook, to Roland Gant, 8 February 1966, HEB 5/6, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>70</sup> See Ngugi, “A Grain of Wheat,” p.299. Special collections, School of Oriental and African Studies Library, SOAS, MS 33722.

<sup>71</sup> Ngugi, Leeds, to Verity, London, 4 May 1966, HEB 5/6, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.



of the hardcover.<sup>72</sup> The process of publishing, however, came to a halt, as the printer, Cox and Wyman Ltd. took exception to various words and phrases, particularly a passage in the novel which seemed to refer to bestiality -- a subject they considered obscene.<sup>73</sup> In fact, the printer's objection is specified by Clause 13 of The Standards Conditions which represented the recognised customs of the printing trade issued by the British Federation of Master Printers.<sup>74</sup>

HEB sought the legal advice of Roland Grant who, after reading the manuscript, thought that the passages which had been marked in *A Grain of Wheat* were "extremely unlikely in the [then] climate of frankness which prevail[ed], to lead to police action against your company and the printers of this book." He suspected that the "jocular reference" to the admittedly punishable offence of bestiality "attract the attention of the non-existent censors in this country."<sup>75</sup> In a cynical tone, he advised that "it is extremely unwise to send the books which contain words more explicit than 'drat' or descriptions more down to earth than 'tummy' to these particular printers. After discussing the subject fully with Cox and Wyman Ltd., HEB felt that

the use of these words is essential in their various contexts, and could not in anyway be censored as pornographic. Moreover, in the present climate of opinion the prospects of any legal action being taken against the book seem extremely unlikely. As one of our editors observes, a cherub lurks among the printer's devils at Fakenham. Would I be right in thinking that at Reading a more liberal, if less cherubic, attitude might prevail? I hope so. But if not we shall

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<sup>72</sup> Internal Memo by Verity sent to Hill, 13 June 1966, HEB 5/6, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>73</sup> John Seddon, London, to Tony Beal, London, 22 July 1966, HEB 10/1, SC, Uni., of R, Reading. See Ngugi, "A Grain of Wheat," p.299. Special collections, School of Oriental and African Studies Library, SOAS, MS 337273. In the published novel, the passage occurs in p. 172 of the 1967 edition and all the reprints up to 1985 and in p. 198 of the 1986 edition (B Format) and its reprints.

<sup>74</sup> The clause titled as Illegal Matter required that: (a) The printer shall not be required to print any matter which in his opinion is or may be of an illegal or libellous nature. (b) The printer shall be indemnified by the customer in respect of any claims, costs and expenses arising out of any legal or libellous matter printed for the customer or any infringement of copyright, patent or design." The Standard Condition were normally printed on the back of the printers' estimates to the publishers.

<sup>75</sup> Roland Grant, Internal Memo, to Tony Beal, 18 July 1966, HEB 5/6, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

reluctantly have to ask you to return the typescript to us so that we might place it elsewhere”<sup>76</sup>

HEB then placed the manuscript with Western Printing Services Ltd (WPS) who thought that the passage objected to was “the most innocent piece of copy [their] lay reader [would] have seen in months.”<sup>77</sup> WPS, then, scheduled to deliver the book proofs on 13 October 1966 and the sheets two months afterwards.<sup>78</sup> The type of paper for *A Grain of Wheat* was to be white MF 42x64/140 and the text bulk 15 3¼/32.<sup>79</sup> Because of the length of the text, it was agreed that the hardcover would be a large crown edition 5 1/8” x 7 ¾” and the paperback a crown octavo format 4 7/8” x 7 ¼”.<sup>80</sup>

Upon the receipt of the proofs, Sambrook forwarded the manuscript to Ngugi in Leeds requesting that if any revision had to be made it should not be profound as the manuscript had already reached a point where it could not “accommodate extensive re-writing.”<sup>81</sup> While the manuscript was in the page proof stage, Sambrook was left with another task, namely convincing William Heinemann to re-consider their decision to print 1850 copies of *A Grain of Wheat*, a number Sambrook felt was modest and did not reflect the importance of the book.

We think this is rather Low as you did 2200 *Weep Not, Child* and 2500 of *The River Between*, and we understand from royalty returns and sales that figures that both of these sold out within twelve months of publication. *A Grain of Wheat* is a much better and much more substantial book than either of these, and by now Mr Ngugi has an established reputation (both the earlier books were very well reviewed)... I should be grateful if you would reconsider your proposed printing number.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Tony Beal, London, to John Seddon, London, 19 July 1966, HEB 10/1, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>77</sup> A.R. Rowe, London, to Verity, London, 27 July 1966, HEB 10/1, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>78</sup> Linda Pellings, London, to Verity, London, 17 August 1966, HEB 10/1, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>79</sup> Verity, London, to Nicky Andrews, London, 22 August 1966, HEB 10/1, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>80</sup> Verity, London, to Pellings, 22 August 1966, HEB 10/1, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>81</sup> Sambrook, London, to Ngugi, Leeds, 13 October, 1966, HEB 5/6, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>82</sup> Sambrook, London, to Gant, London, 17 October 1966, HEB 10/1, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.



Apparently, William Heinemann were concerned over the high cost which would result from printing the novel in the Large Crown. These expenses they felt, and Sambrook agreed, would not allow them to price the book economically. Given that the original cost was quoted on the basis of 2000 and 2500 copies, Sambrook suggested bringing out the hardback edition in Crown Octavo rather than the Large Crown. He argued that though the total saving was likely to be offset by the lower printing number, increasing the quantity was the other way around. His point was that since the estimate for printing 1850 copies, the price per copy in sheets including paper worked out at 3s. 5d, while in the original plan to print 2500 the price went down to 3s.3d.<sup>83</sup>

Despite Sambrook's appeals to increase the printing number of hardcover edition of *A Grain of Wheat*, William Heinemann did not reconsider the matter until three weeks later when Nicky Andrews, William Heinemann's Production Manager, intervened to put forward a significant printing order of 3000 copies with WSP. Andrews' stepping-in came out interestingly five days after Ngugi sent back the proofs to HEB. Ngugi's 'final' revision, as was feared, created another difficulty for HEB. In his Letter to his editor, Verity, he explained that,

I have for instance slightly altered the passage on page 203, to make it fit into what I had already cancelled in the same chapter. But I've found that for the book to be balanced [...] it is necessary to change, swap, some chapters. Thus I would like Chapter 8 to come after Chapter 4; and Chapter 12 to come after Chapter 10. In fact you can (if you like, and if it helps) run chapter 12 in front of as or a continuation of Chapter 10, with only a space in between – in which case you'll have to change the numbering of all the other chapters.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid. See also letters from Sambrook to Gant 25 October 1966, HEB 10/1, SC, Uni., of R, Reading. From Verity to Peter Ireland, 27 October 1966, HEB 10/1; from Sambrook, to Ireland CC to Gant on 28 October 1966, HEB 10/1; from Gant to Sambrook, 20 October 1966; and from Nicky Andrews to Verity, 10 November 1966, HEB 10/1 ; and Letter from Andrews to Verity 11 November 1966, HEB 10/1.

<sup>84</sup> Ngugi, Leeds, to Verity, London, 6 November 1966, HEB 5/6. , SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

The only copy of Ngugi's corrected set of proofs for *A Grain of Wheat* was forwarded to WSP with the purpose of getting a rough estimate of the cost of these corrections,<sup>85</sup> which turned out to be heavy enough for HEB, as to necessitate cutting down the number of corrections or sharing the costs with Ngugi. To this end, Verity wrote a long letter to Ngugi explaining the problem which his extensive revision caused.

You remember that when you were here I warned you that the cost of all those corrections to *A Grain of Wheat* would be huge. I've now had a note from the printer of how much they will cost – £222.9.6. It will give you some idea of just how huge this is if I tell you that normally we allow for corrections ten per cent of the cost of setting the book up in type, which in this case comes to £31. And we usually find this sufficient. William Heinemann are doing 3000 of the cased edition (which is more than they did of the first two), but even this won't allow us and them to publish at a reasonable price if we have to bear the cost of all the corrections.<sup>86</sup>

Since one article in the contract stated "that author's corrections to proofs costing over ten per cent of the composition cost are [his] responsibility," Verity proposed that Ngugi should allow £91.9.6 towards the cost of these corrections in his royalties, of which £46 to be deducted from royalties due at the end of September 1967 and the remainder from those due at the end of March 1968, leaving HEB to pay the remaining £131.<sup>87</sup> Ngugi's response to these new tidings was simple and firm. He had no objection to deducting the £91.9.6 from his royalties. *A Grain of Wheat* had "cost [him] a lot of time and labour and headaches and doubts and fears." Besides, the changes he proposed were "necessary for his peace of mind (and soul!)"<sup>88</sup>. Consequently, an order of printing 3000 copies for the hardback were scheduled for publication by the autumn of 1967, and 12000 copies for the paperback due within six months from the hardcover edition.

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<sup>85</sup> Verity, London, to Linda Pellings, London, 9 November 1966, HEB 10/1, SC, Uni., of R, Reading. See also Letter from M.L. Hill to Verity 14<sup>th</sup> November 1966, HEB 10/1, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>86</sup> Verity, London, to Ngugi, Leeds, 18 November 1966, HEB 5/6, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ngugi, Leeds, to Verity, London, 21 November 1966, HEB 5/6, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.



The reviews of the novel varied from unreserved praise to severe criticism. Writing in *African Affairs*, Gerald Moore admired the ability of Ngugi to bring the plot “to a climax in the events of Independence Day itself,” and follow up “the preoccupations which dominated his first two works, *The River between* and *Weep Not, Child*.”<sup>89</sup> The review, however, observed that “The new book still leaves the reader with a sense of disappointment” adding bluntly that “Ngugi is not an eloquent writer: his dialogue does not work closely, nor does his writing generally exhibit any interest of texture.”<sup>90</sup> Reviewing the novel for *Transition*, C. A. Okafor considered the book an improvement since Ngugi’s “handling of his present material, as compared with his earlier works, shows great dexterity and the maturity he himself has attained since the undergraduate days of his earlier novels.”<sup>91</sup> However, because Ngugi tended to “spend so many pages narrating an episode which is not vital to the development of the plot,” Okafor felt the novel lapsed into irrelevant and tedious details. Even when he was left wondering “whether there is anything else [Ngugi] can write about other than the Emergency, the Independent school movement and the detention of Jomo Kenyatta”, Okafor warns that a writer in the position of Ngugi should ensure that writing about recognizable characters and events does not degenerate, to some extent, into newspaper reporting.<sup>92</sup>

While such reviews emphasised some of the novel’s flaws, *The Legon Observer* considered Ngugi “such an adroit craftsman that he is able to convey the facts of the story through human conflict and superb characterisation.” Ngugi’s mastery of this literary device is evidence against the critical allegation “that the African novel tends to externalise human conflict to such an extent that depth of insight into human character gets

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<sup>89</sup> Gerald Moore, review of *A Grain of Wheat*, by Ngugi, *African Affairs*, Vol. 66, No. 265 (Oct., 1967): 374-375.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Clem Abiaziem Okafor, ‘The Third Novel’, Review of *A Grain of Wheat*, by Ngugi, *Transition* N 32 (Aug-Sep., 1967) pp. 60-61.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

sacrificed.”<sup>93</sup> In turn, *English Studies* noted that thanks to this novel, Ngugi was now established “as the most impressive African novelist in English.”<sup>94</sup> More than any African writer before him, Ngugi was credited with bringing to the surface what the Mau Mau Emergency could mean to both the English and Kenyans. Because the ‘freedom-fighters’ naturally occupied the forefront of the action, “they are presented with a good novelist’s breadth of viewpoint” and here the writer’s “insight into the play of complex motive and circumstance lifts this book clear of the general run of narrowly folkloristic, political or nationalistic African fiction.”<sup>95</sup> Indeed, these ambivalent reviews fostered a wider reception of the novel which has, since its publication, gone through several reprints in the AWS alone, not to mention other editions and translations by various publishers around the world.<sup>96</sup>

### -III-

After a silence of five years, Ngugi had fresh thoughts about publishing a collection of stories. He had shown David Hill in Nairobi a new story which was later forwarded to the London office. David Hill, however, was dismayed to know that HEB’s “leading East African writer should be thinking of going to another publisher,” EALB. The origin of the rumour could have been David Hill’s conversation with Ngugi, but it could have well been received from other sources. EAPH for instance were trying hard to attract successful African writers. Already the move of Armah to publish with them had caused some

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<sup>93</sup> Jawa Apronti, Review of *A Grain of Wheat*, by Ngugi, *The Legon Observer* VIII, N12 (June, 1968):19-20.

<sup>94</sup> Anonymous, Review of *A Grain of Wheat*, by Ngugi, *English Studies* (June 1968).

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> *A Grain of Wheat* was reprinted in the AWS five times before it was rest with new pagination in 1975. From 1975 to 1986, the novel was reprinted seven times before it was reissued and revised for newly designed AWS in 1986. Since then it continued to be reprinted in various editions. It was also translated into several languages including French (1969), Russian (1969), Uzbek (1971), German (1971), Finnish (1972), Polish (1972), Italian (1977), Hungarian (1979), Dutch (1979), Japanese (1981), Swedish (1982), Slovak (1982), and Shona (1988).



bitterness among HEB publishers. The possibility of Ngugi's departure then seemed at this point rather alarming.

Not knowing what Ngugi's reasons were, the young David Hill left to Currey and Sambrook the task of keeping Ngugi "in the fold."<sup>97</sup> Currey, in turn, left the subject of convincing Ngugi to the influential Sambrook. In his letter to David Hill, Currey indicated that while the new collection had formally been accepted for publication, HEB had a reservation about the fact the book had already appeared in AWS. To get over this difficulty, HEB had advised Ngugi to contribute one or two more stories.<sup>98</sup> Sambrook had quite a different approach. He had paid little attention to the rumour of Ngugi's intended departure from HEB. Instead he wrote to reassure him that HEB were doing their best to make his books a success. He showed his optimistic expectations for *Homecoming* which was about to be published, and informed Ngugi of the good news that his department were "awaiting a firm order from our Australian office" on *Weep Not, Child* which had been prescribed in New Guinea.<sup>99</sup>

Sambrook reminded Ngugi of how a subject of putting together a collection of old and new stories had been discussed a year earlier when his former agent, David Bolt, approached HEB with the manuscript. HEB subsequently let the matter fade because they felt, at the time, that Ngugi "hadn't enough new material to offer and that a re-issue of eight of [his] old stories was unnecessary as six of them were available in print."<sup>100</sup> Because the situation now was different, Sambrook proposed putting together "an

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<sup>97</sup> David Hill, Nairobi, to Hill and Sambrook, London 2 August 1972, HEB 12/9, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>98</sup> Currey, London, to David Hill, Nairobi, 10 August 1972, HEB 12/9, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>99</sup> Sambrook told Ngugi that advance copies had just been sent to him in Nairobi, and that a bulk of 2,000 copies of the paperback and 100 of the cased edition on order would soon be despatched to HEB (East Africa). In Britain, pre-publication subscriptions had gone well since bookshops orders exceeded 100 and copies for promotion should build up to around 300 on publication day, which was what one would hope for from a book of critical essays. Sambrook also informed Ngugi that they were now looking for someone from USA to publish the American edition.

<sup>100</sup> Four of Ngugi's short stories had appeared in David Cooks' *Origin East Africa* while "The Martyr" appeared in *Modern African Prose*. David Cook, ed. *Origin East Africa: A Makerere Anthology*, (London, Ibadan, Nairobi: Heinemann Educational Books, 1965). The other two had appeared in Richard Rive, ed. *Modern African Prose: An Anthology*, (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1967).

attractive volume of, say, four to five new stories with those already published.... It would be rather the same as Chinua's *Girls at War* where the proportion of new and old material is about 50/50."<sup>101</sup>

Sambrook's letter certainly had its strong effect, though Ngugi was still showing signs of hesitance to publish with HEB. In attempt to confront Ngugi's reluctance, Currey sent the contract to Bob Markham rather than to the author because "it would be best if a special visit paid to Ngugi, perhaps via David [Hill] or Henry [Chakava], to get him to sign."<sup>102</sup> The contract, however, was returned unsigned because Ngugi wanted to negotiate certain terms within the contract: (1) he asked for a 10% royalty, (2) he wanted to retain US rights, and (3) he wished Clause 18 to be deleted.<sup>103</sup> The Clause to which Ngugi objected is revealing:

The PUBLISHERS shall have the first refusal of (including the first opportunity to read and consider for publication) the AUTHOR's next two full-length works suitable for publication in volume form (and the Author shall offer to the Publishers for this purpose the same rights and territories as those covered by this agreement) on terms to be mutually agreed upon, or in lieu of agreement upon the same terms as are contained in this agreement. If however the PUBLISHERS decline the first of these works the AUTHOR shall not be bound to offer them the second. The PUBLISHERS shall exercise this option within 2 months of receipt of the complete typescript or copy, except that they shall not be required to exercise it until two months after the publication of the book which is the subject of this agreement<sup>104</sup>

In their inter-memos HEB seemed to agree to a 10% royalty and give Ngugi the liberty to retain US right on condition that they should be kept informed about who the American publishers were in order to negotiate offset right with them. Nevertheless, the deletion of

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<sup>101</sup> Sambrook, London, to Ngugi, Nairobi, 11 August 1972, HEB 12/9, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>102</sup> Currey, London, to Bob Markham, David Hill and Chakava, Nairobi, 2 November 1972, HEB 12/9, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>103</sup> David Hill, Nairobi, to Currey and Sambrook, 8 December 1972, HEB 12/9, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>104</sup> See page 4 of the Memorandum of Agreement between Ngugi and Heinemann Educational Books, dated 2 of April 1973, HEB 12/9, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.



Clause 18 was a little annoying for the HEB publishers since they had paid Ngugi a handsome advance of £5000 against all his royalties to help him build a house.<sup>105</sup>

Sambrook who took a particular interest<sup>106</sup> in this situation expressed his disappointment as follows:

I am bit puzzled by Ngugi: he seems to have come to a full stop. The short stories are good but, in confidence, I don't think they show any advance on his previous, admittedly high, standard of writing. He is full of ideas, young, famous – what serious writing is he doing or planning? I could ask him of course, direct but letters are pretty useless for finding out this sort of things. I suppose you and Henry both see him from time to time.<sup>107</sup>

Chakava admitted that Ngugi could possibly “had reached the end of the string after the 3 novels,” but he went on to add that their author had “had to start on new lines.” Ngugi had just finished the *Short Stories* and was waiting for a letter from Doubledays, “who apparently had not yet decided to go ahead and he wanted to settle this before signing the contract with us.” Ngugi, who had for quite some time now been involved in writing a full-length novel, also agreed that HEB should have his next two manuscripts but felt that there was no need to include this in a contract.<sup>108</sup> Redrafted according to his wishes, the contract allowed an advance of £500 which HEB considered part of the large £5,000 advance recently made to the author.<sup>109</sup>

Whereas satisfying the financial needs of Ngugi was one way of keeping him “in the fold,” placating him was the other way. “Everybody is delighted when I brought back the manuscript of *Secret Lives*,” wrote Currey in his comforting style, “everybody is queuing to read the new stories.”<sup>110</sup> As such were HEB's letters exposing the extent to

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<sup>105</sup> Currey internal memo to Hill, 11 December 1972, HEB 12/9, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>106</sup> Sambrook, London, to Chakava, Nairobi, 12 February 1973, HEB 12/9, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>107</sup> Sambrook, London, to David Hill, Nairobi, 9 January 1973, HEB 12/9, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>108</sup> Chakava, Nairobi, to Sambrook, London, 19 January 1973, HEB 12/9, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>109</sup> Sambrook, London, to Chakava, Nairobi, 23 February 1973, HEB 12/9, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

which HEB became patient and careful with the changing Ngugi whose new name, Ngugi, signified the beginning of a metamorphosis into a radical writer resentful of foreign cultural, political and economic influences. Made Senior Lecturer and Acting Head of the Department,<sup>111</sup> Ngugi certainly came to realise at this stage how important his position was in the African literary scene in general and to the AWS in particular. Few months earlier when Achebe relinquished his job as the Editorial Advisor to the Series, Ngugi was asked by HEB to be Achebe's successor. On the other hand, HEB's bitter legal problem with Armah had just started and was to result afterwards, let us reiterate, in his departure to EAPH. HEB could only do their best to sooth their prominent authors.

The receipt of the complete manuscript, now titled "Secret Lives", by mid April 1973 marked finally the beginning of another phase in the production of the collection, but also provided the ground for more financial demands from the author. On the 22 June 1973 Ngugi wrote to Currey asking for a further £1500 against his royalties for the coming years so as to complete and furnish his house. The royalty situation, however, was a bit bleak as a severe drop in Ngugi's earnings on his books from £2219.35 in 1971 to £868.70 in 1972 was partly accounted for by the fact that *The River Between* had come off the EAEC O Level prescription and *A Grain of Wheat* off the EAEC A Level. Moreover, because none of Ngugi's books were on the 1975 EAEC recommended lists, Currey advised that it would "perhaps be more correct to view his earnings at about £1000 a year rather than over £2000." Building on such a rate, Currey assumed that Ngugi would take five to six years to earn the £5115 and seven to eight years to earn the £6615 if HEB were to pay another £1500.<sup>112</sup> As Ngugi's works were thought to be in demand, it appeared that, once published, both *Secret Lives* and *Ballad for Barmaid* would help the sales and increase his royalty earnings. Given these prospects, HEB agreed, two weeks later, to send Ngugi

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<sup>110</sup> Currey, London, Ngugi, Nairobi, 2 March 1973, HEB 12/9, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>111</sup> Bob Markham, Nairobi, to Currey, London, 8 May 1973, HEB 12/9, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>112</sup> Currey, Internal Memo, to Hill, 2 July 1973, HEB 12/9, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.



another advance of £1500 to enable him to finish his house. Currey took up the chance to bring Ngugi the news and congratulate him on winning the Lotus Prize. “You ought to have a Lotus bedroom,”<sup>113</sup> wrote Currey, “we are opening a bottle of champagne over here to celebrate.”<sup>114</sup>

By the end of August, *Secret Lives* was sent off to the printer for setting.<sup>115</sup> The page proofs were ready by November and were forwarded to Ngugi for correction on the 13<sup>th</sup> November 1973. The Plan was to receive his correction by the 10<sup>th</sup> of December so the course of printing could start early in 1974.<sup>116</sup> Meanwhile, the manuscript was sent to a proof reader whose main concern was Ngugi’s punctuation which he found “rather individualistic.”<sup>117</sup> Despite the fact that the manuscript being set and complete, its production was held up till Ngugi settled a deal with an America publisher.

While Doubledays were not in favour of publishing *Secret Lives*, Ngugi turned to Lawrence Hill who had just published *Homecoming*. The latter, though showing his interest in the manuscript, had to negotiate the large advance of \$5000 Ngugi had asked for. Lawrence Hill offered instead an advance of \$1500 “against a royalty of 10% to 5000 copies and 12% thereafter.” He even offered another \$1000 for an option on Ngugi’s next novel.<sup>118</sup> When the news of the offer reached London, Sambrook decided to intervene and provide Ngugi with some professional advice, encouraging him to accept the American offer: “I think it is not at all a bad offer. I must tell you that short stories are notoriously

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<sup>113</sup> Currey, London, to Ngugi, Nairobi, 2 July 1973, HEB 12/9, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>114</sup> Currey, London, to Ngugi, 3 July 1973, HEB 12/9, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>115</sup> Ann Scorgie, London, to Ngugi, Nairobi, 18 July 1973, HEB 12/9, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>116</sup> Elizabeth Ledermann, London, to Ngugi, Nairobi, 13 November 1973, HEB 12/9, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>117</sup> Anonymous (letter/report), to Elizabeth Ledermann, London, 11 December 1973, HEB 12/9, SC, Uni., of R, Reading. The writer/reader commented on Ngugi’s use of punctuations as follows: “He is, however, rather bad on pairs of commas before inclosing subordinate clauses – putting in one or the other, but not often both. He also neglects the sometimes very necessary comma before ‘and’ acting as a mid-sentence conjunction. The hyphenation is sometimes inconsistent; and ‘whiteman’ is usually one word, except for ‘Meeting in the Dark’ when it becomes two words again.”

<sup>118</sup> Lawrence Hill, New York, to Ngugi, Nairobi, 31 March 1974, HEB 12/9, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

difficult to place, even when they come from well-established writers.” But this was not the only factor; Sambrook informed Ngugi that HEB was holding up the printing of *Secret Lives* because Lawrence Hill had asked if HEB would run his edition along side theirs, and warned him that in case Lawrence Hill was “faced with having to print separately from us the additional cost may well put him off taking the book at all.”<sup>119</sup> Thus, after a month, Ngugi decided to accept Lawrence Hill’s offer on condition that he would be paid an advance of \$1500 on his next novel instead of the proposed \$1000.<sup>120</sup>

Two months later he wrote to Currey complaining that he had neither received a contract nor the promised advance from Lawrence Hill. Ngugi’s financial situation was depressing that he sought the possibility of having an extra £1000. Ngugi, in the words of Chakava, seemed “to regret having had to negotiate with an American publisher. He does not seem to consider it a useful exercise particularly since (he knows) he is so bad at writing letters.”<sup>121</sup> The advance from Lawrence Hill apparently arrived soon afterwards, because HEB made an order on 8 August 1974 to Cox and Wyman Ltd., to print 10,000 copies of the book. The book was to come out in 160 pages and set in 11/12 pt. Monotype Fournier to a measure 22ems wide by 35 lines per page. On 20 of August 1974, HEB also made an order to Morrison & Gibb Ltd on behalf of Lawrence Hill to reproduce 1,500 copies of *Secret Lives*. The delivery date was to be 22 November 1974, but the date of publication, on the request of HEB was changed to the start of 1975.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Sambrook, London, to Ngugi, Nairobi, 11 April 1974, HEB 12/9, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>120</sup> Ngugi, Nairobi, to Sambrook, London, 13 May 1974, HEB 12/9, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>121</sup> Memorandum From Chakava to Currey, 12 July, 1974, HEB 12/9, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>122</sup> Richard Gale, Print and Order Sheet, 8 August 1974, HEB 12/9, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.



## -IV-

The publication of *Secret Lives* inaugurated a new phase in Ngugi's career and signalled a different direction in his creative writing. In the Preface to the collection, Ngugi stated that the short stories reflected his own "creative autobiography" and "touch on ideas and moods affecting" him since 1960.<sup>123</sup> Could these "ideas and moods" be said to have some influence on his relationship with his publishers? And if so, to what extent this influence can be sensed in his dealings with HEB? Ngugi's relationship with Heinemann was complex and rendered more so by the enduring complexities and paradoxes of the colonial past. He was an avid reader of English literature during his undergraduate years, and repeatedly acknowledges the deep influence of Joseph Conrad and D.H. Lawrence on his writing, both of whom were also published by Heinemann.<sup>124</sup> Still, in Ngugi's case the difficulty lied in the asymmetrical evolution between his professional relationship with HEB and his own personal and intellectual growth as a writer.

Between 1962 and 1967, Ngugi appeared to be too modest and reticent in his position as a writer vis-à-vis HEB. He accepted all the corrections his editors suggested, something which he later – in the 1970's and 1980's – resisted and often dismissed. In terms of financial matters, the publishing records reveal that he neither discussed the content of his publishing contract with HEB, nor objected to the standard royalty advances he was offered. His letters to his editors throughout this period were often handwritten, friendly in tone carrying impressions of his life, anxieties, and feelings. He even firmly requested his existing Christian name James Ngugi rather than Thiong'o Ngugi to be identified as the name of the author of works published before *Secret Lives*.

It is important to ask what impact this friendly author-publisher relationship had on Ngugi's intellectual position at this stage and the central issues which dominated his

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<sup>123</sup> Ngugi, Preface to *Secret Lives, and Other Stories* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1975).

<sup>124</sup> John de Villers, "The Birth of A New East African: Interview with James Ngugi," (1964), in *Ngugi wa Thiong'o Speaks: Interviews with the Kenyan Writer*, ed. Reinhard W. Sander and Bernth Lindfors (Oxford: James Currey Publishers, 2006), p. 8.

writings. The answer might be found in revisiting some aspects of his career as a writer. Carol Sicherman shows that throughout his years at Manguu Gikuyu Independent School (1948 -1955) and his time at Alliance High School (1955-1959) Ngugi's education was marked by "mental subversion effected upon" him by the colonial educational system.<sup>125</sup> At Alliance High School, she explains, "the combination of flexible ethnic pluralism, rigid and proselytizing Christianity, and colonial doctrinalism – along with high intellectual demands" wielded profound influence on the young Ngugi. His move to Makerere (1959-1964) exposed him further to the same combination but which was now "differently proportioned: with the doctrine muted, with the intellectual demands increased, and – perhaps most important – with a much greater encouragement to write creatively."<sup>126</sup>

In fact, what Ngugi published in this period, apart from "The Fig Tree" (December 1960) and 'The Wind' (February 1961), amounted to a collection of newspaper articles and commentaries numbered eighty in all. Ngugi's early journalism, as Bernth Lindfors's rightly shows, helps in tracing some of Ngugi's "literary ideas and social attitudes [...] on a variety of important issues at a time when he was at the threshold of his career as an author."<sup>127</sup> Lindfors seems to indicate that at this stage Ngugi had a little interest in political or historical protest. In an article titled "Wanted – A proper Place for Art," Ngugi begins with: "Politics! Politics! Every time we open a newspaper, political arguments and quarrels stare us in the face."<sup>128</sup> In another article he states: "I am tired of the talk about 'African Socialism'."<sup>129</sup> Surprisingly, some of Ngugi's commentaries contain a clear

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<sup>125</sup> Sicherman, "Ngugi's Colonial Education: "The Subversion...of the African Mind"," p.11.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>127</sup> Lindfors, *The Blind Men and the Elephant*, p.84.

<sup>128</sup> Ngugi, "Wanted – A Proper Place for Art," *Sunday Nation*, December 23, 1962, p. 11, quoted in Bernth Lindfors, *The Blind Men and the Elephant*, p.80.

<sup>129</sup> Ngugi, "Must we drag Africanness into Everything?," *Sunday Nation*, September 2, 1962, p.30, quoted in Bernth Lindfors, *The Blind Men and the Elephant*, p.80



denunciation of the Land Freedom Army,<sup>130</sup> a defence of Christianity as “the best challenge to Communism or any form of totalitarianism,”<sup>131</sup> and a rallying call against sending Kenyan students “to any obscure half-civilised country that calls itself Communistic and Socialistic.”<sup>132</sup> Perhaps these words communicate a liberal attitude towards political and social issues, but they remain fragments in a large body of articles which expressed serious political and social criticism. Lindfors explains that Ngugi “came out against racialism, tribalism, regionalism and censorship, and championed such causes as old age pensions, enlightened peasant agriculture, and women’s rights.”<sup>133</sup>

These ideological tendencies are clearly articulated in his creative writing. His fiction seems rather concerned with the experience of the individual. The short stories which form the first two parts of *Secret Lives*, for instance, present the individuals’ inner conflicts within the Kenyan society. The first part of the collection entitled “Of Mothers and Children”, in fact, reflects a community untouched by either colonialism or Christianity. Its basic concern seems to be childlessness and the negative effect this has on the childless woman in a culture which places much importance on the ability to bear children. The stories in the second, however, treat themes that involve the missionary activities and their effects that touched the lives of converted natives as well as the Mau Mau war and its dramatic repercussions on Kenyan individuals.

The same themes also define his first two novels. *The River Between* tells the story of a community which lost its sense of solidarity and unity after the arrival of Christian missionaries. The main message which the novel conveys, however, revolves around the need for reconciliation between antagonistic beliefs represented by Christianity and local

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<sup>130</sup> Ngugi, “We Must Halt Spread of ‘Freedom Army’,” *Sunday Nation*, October 28, 1962, p.31, quoted in Lindfors, *The Blind Men and the Elephant*, p.75.

<sup>131</sup> Ngugi, “African culture: the mistake that Kenyatta made,” *Sunday Post*, 6 August 1961, p.10. quoted in Lindfors, *The Blind Men and the Elephant*, p.75.

<sup>132</sup> Ngugi, “Respect Will Come When We are Self-Sufficient,” *Sunday Nation*, 17 March 1963, p.29. See Lindfors, *The Blind Men and the Elephant*, p.75.

<sup>133</sup>-Lindfors, *The Blind Men and the Elephant*, p.75.

tribal beliefs and values. In Ngugi's words, the novel is concerned "with trying to remove the central Christian doctrine from the dress of Western culture, and seeing how this might be grafted onto the central beliefs of our people."<sup>134</sup> *Weep Not, Child* deals with the question of the Mau Mau warfare from the perspective of a young boy who is caught up between the optimistic thoughts of modern education and the reality of the colonial situation of Kenya in the early 1950s. What is remarkable about these texts, however, is that the narrative does not condemn or support the action of the various characters involved in the two storylines. Many of the reviews which followed the publications of these works stressed the neutrality of the author in presenting the diverse conflicting elements within the novels. Some commentaries even drew attention to what they assumed to be "contradictory impulses of Ngugi's early aesthetic education: on the one hand, they seem to affirm Gikuyu (and African) culture; on the other, they appear to attack traditionalism and endorse Christian doctrinalism."<sup>135</sup>

By the time he completed his postgraduate studies at Leeds University, Ngugi's ideological convictions were no longer the same. In 1966 in an interview with Robert Serumaga and John Nagenda, Ngugi announced: "Frankly as a citizen, and as a person, I would like to see a socialist East Africa.... I am concerned with the social and political problems as they are in Africa now -- I want to see a change in Africa now."<sup>136</sup> In another interview with 'fellow students' a year after, Ngugi' gave to understand that he found both Fanon's ideas and Marxist theory a great source of inspiration and hope. Marxist theory seemed to offer "a doctrine to replace the Christian model that was inculcated at Alliance and assumed at Makerere."<sup>137</sup> This ideological position not only helped shape his understanding of Kenyan history, and the power relations between social classes as well as

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<sup>134</sup> Reinhard Sander and Bernth Lindfors, eds. *Ngugi wa Thiong'o Speaks*, p. 27.

<sup>135</sup> Apollo O Amoko, "The Resemblance of Colonial Mimicry: A Revisionary Reading of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*," *Research in African Literatures* 36:1 (2005): p. 38.

<sup>136</sup> John Nagenda and Robert Serumaga, "A Discussion", in Reinhard W. Sander and Bernth Lindfors, ed., *Ngugi wa Thiong'o Speaks*, p. 24.

<sup>137</sup> Sicherman, "Ngugi's Colonial Education," pp.12-3.



between the colonised and the coloniser, but also opened up for him new horizons for creative writing. Hitherto he had qualms about the usefulness of writing in English. “You see,” he told his interviewers, “I have reached a point of crisis. I don’t know whether it is worth any longer writing in English”<sup>138</sup>

All this seems to have had an impact on his relationship with HEB publishers who, as the last section in this chapter has shown, had to negotiate a careful deal with their bestselling East African author over his collection of short stories so as to keep him “in fold”. By then, he had been a lecturer at the University of Nairobi and began to voice some of his ideological convictions like calling for substitution of the Department of English by the Department of literature (1968), and resigning from the university in protest of the interference of the state with academic freedom at the University (1969). His experience as lecturer in the USA (1970-1971) and subsequent return to the University of Nairobi boosted his self-esteem. His professional development coupled with the multiple educational and cultural activities in which he was engaged led him to reassess his relationship with HEB. His letters to HEB’ editors now typed and printed on the University of Nairobi’s headed paper at this period reveal a confident writer determined to strike a satisfactory deal commensurate with his new international standing. Consolidating his reputation as one of Africa’s leading writers was a priority for the next stage of his career.

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<sup>138</sup> Alan Marcuson, Mike Conzalez and Dave Williams, “James Ngugi Interviewd by fellow Students at Leeds University,” p. 32.

## Chapter Five

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### *The Path to Recognition: The Rise of Ngugi wa Thiong'o*

Then suddenly, from somewhere in the depths of my being,  
rose a strong rebellious voice. "Wake up from your spiritual  
lethargy and intellectual torpor."

-Ngugi, *Detained*, (24)

It was by sheer accident that I met Ngugi in Africa Book Centre in Covent Garden one afternoon in February 2005.<sup>1</sup> The temptation to talk to the author on whom I had chosen to write my doctoral dissertation was too much to resist. I grabbed a copy of *A Grain of Wheat*, greeted him as he was browsing with his sleepy eyes through the shelves, introduced myself and gave him the copy to sign. A short conversation ensued. But the smoothness of this casual encounter was bound to be disrupted. A question about his relation with HEB and the man was dismayed. His answer was rather confusing; a kind of objection that sounded like a "na" with a long vowel. It was like evoking an adulterous affair that the man deemed inappropriate to talk about. As our conversation came to an end, I was left with a nagging feeling of puzzlement at his curious reaction. It was interesting to know how Ngugi's discontent emanated from his ideological convictions, but what was so intriguing then was to find out how this particular relation changed over the years. This chapter aims at exploring the process through which this relation had become strained between the author and his publishers.

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<sup>1</sup> I say coincidence because I was heading to Hayward Gallery in London's South Bank which was hosting, it was said, "the largest exhibition of contemporary African art ever seen in Europe". It was there that I was supposed to attend a BBC radio three recording of an interview with Ngugi about his then forthcoming novel, *The Wizard of the Crow* (2006).



When he began work on the third part of his novel, *Ballad for a Barmaid*, Ngugi was able to inform Sambrook that the new novel was “coming on fine.”<sup>2</sup> His progress was promising and for a while he was hopeful that a draft of the novel would be completed by the end of June, and ready to be submitted for publication in December 1974. But this was an ambitious undertaking, fraught with several difficulties. The major challenge, as Ngugi explained, lay in the attempt “to yoke together three different situations” where inter-relationships of several narrators and time scales had to be geared to “get the kind of action (+ plot) that would make everything cohere”. It was natural that Ngugi felt “alternately elated and depressed by the novel” which seemed to have “taken longer time to write than any of [his] other novels.”<sup>3</sup>

While this was good news to his publishers, it was until the end of January 1975 that Sambrook received the first two thirds of Ngugi’s manuscript, now re-titled *Wrestlers with God*.<sup>4</sup> The author of three novels, Ngugi was by now well on his way to consolidate his name as one of the leading creative writers to emerge from Africa. Despite his achievement, Ngugi continued to search for the appropriate pace and style for his writing. Often his initial manuscripts had to be rewritten and reedited to match the rigorous demands of his own editors. On this particular occasion, the report of Chakava was encouraging but not entirely favourable. He admitted that Ngugi’s characters were “real and rounded,” and his narration was “skilfully done and even more complex than in *A Grain of Wheat*.”<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, he was worried that the novel was very much caught up in the old brooding mood which characterised the earlier novels:

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<sup>2</sup> Ngugi, Nairobi, to-Sambrook, London, 4 March 1974, HEB 12/9, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>3</sup> Ngugi, Nairobi, to Sambrook, London, 13 May 1974, HEB 12/9, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>4</sup> Sambrook, London, to Chakava, Nairobi, 28 January 1975 HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>5</sup> See Report by Chakava, 29 January 1975, HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

The 4 main characters carry the story at various stages and the whole thing fits in quite naturally although it becomes a bit tricky when the narrator assumes the voices of 'we' or 'I'.... This novel although a leap forward in time does not reveal a basic development in Ngugi's art. It is noteworthy that at a time when most writers are going urban and 'pop' in Kenya, Ngugi still has a serious concern for the peasant in the countryside. But it is the same old concern of *Weep Not, Child*, *Black Hermit*, *A Grain of Wheat*. He has not taken from the popular style revealed in some of the stories in *Secret Lives*. It is as if, to enhance his own theme, he has taken refuge in that old biblical cry – in – anguish “How can I sing a new song in a strange land?”<sup>6</sup>

For his part, Sambrook's initial reaction was that Ngugi's use of English was “a little idiosyncratic” which could be difficult for English-speaking readers to understand. He suggested that the author should “stick to the normal constructions of English unless there is a very good reason for changing them.”<sup>7</sup> While the overall structure of chapters seemed acceptable, Sambrook experienced some difficulty “in identifying characters, as there are a great number, and this was made more complex by the time sequences.”<sup>8</sup> But these were not the only feedbacks Ngugi received. He had had so many constructive comments from friends and critics that he had to consider re-writing the whole novel. For Chakava, this was a clear indication that the final version could not be ready before the end of 1975.<sup>9</sup> These hopes were not misplaced, for towards the end of September of the same year on his return from Yalta, where he had spent a month in the Soviet Writers Union's guesthouse, Ngugi brought back a completed manuscript of the novel he now called *Petals of Blood*.<sup>10</sup> A few months lapsed before the typed copy was made available, the work itself being

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Sambrook, London, to Chakava, Nairobi, 4 February 1975, HEB 14/7. , SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Chakava, Nairobi, to Sambrook, London, 11 February 1975, HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>10</sup> Sambrook, London, to Ngugi, Nairobi, 8 October 1975, HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading. Sambrook explained that when a clean and final manuscript was all set the process would take some twelve months before the date of publication. Such an interval would include correction and return of proofs, and two to three month period “between receipt of bound copies and publication date in order to give [their] publicity people and [...] home and overseas trade departments sufficient time to publicise and promote the hardback properly.”



slowed down by the ‘atrocious’ handwriting of the author.<sup>11</sup> In the covering letter, Ben Mollel held Ngugi accountable for the state of their final typescript and explained that “neither Henry [Chakava] nor I have been able to read the manuscript because Ngugi has been coming into the office and each time with an addition or subtraction – mostly additions.”<sup>12</sup> Ngugi himself admitted to have been puzzled by his inability “to make up [his] mind about whether a novel is really finished or not.”<sup>13</sup> Now that he felt his manuscript was “really 99.9 percent final,” Ngugi called for special attention to be given to how the book should be produced. He was, in particular, “keen that all the spacing be well respected because of clarity in time.”<sup>14</sup> Sambrook, who was used to Ngugi’s excessive habit of revising his manuscripts, was left to incorporate all the corrections and additions into the ‘top copy’ of *Petals of Blood* before he could carry out his own editorial work or forward copies to his readers for reports.

On the pecuniary side, as the novel reached a stage of completion, Ngugi felt this was the opportune time to ask for “a quick and big” advance of £4000.<sup>15</sup> The good news was that his royalty earnings had risen up significantly during 1975, which relieved him of his longstanding debt of £1,842.46 with HEB. Besides the future prescription of *The River Between* by East African Examination Council which promised a substantial increase in his royalties for the years 1976 and 1977, there was a noticeable rise in sales of the school edition of *Weep Not, Child* in Nigeria both in October (50,460 copies) and November (4,006 copies) following its recommendation for West African Examination Council. On this basis, the requested advance was approved.<sup>16</sup> However, bearing in mind Ngugi’s

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<sup>11</sup> That’s how Ngugi himself described his handwriting. See his letter to Sambrook dated 5 of January 1976, HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>12</sup> Ben Mollel, Nairobi, to Sambrook, London, 8 January 1976, HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading. Ben Mollel was an editor at HEB East Africa.

<sup>13</sup> Ngugi, Nairobi, to Sambrook, London, 5 of January 1976, HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Sambrook, London, to Ngugi, Nairobi, 23 January 1976, HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

reluctance to accept the proposed terms on *Secret Lives* four years earlier, Sambrook was now cautious in his approach to propose the royalty terms of *Petals of Blood*. Since the production costs of such a lengthy novel were expected to be relatively high, Sambrook was certain that HEB would have “to fight hard for a price on the paperback which will not frighten off both the general market and schools and colleges.”<sup>17</sup> In an attempt to keep the price within bounds, Sambrook proposed to draw up a contract for 10% on the hardback and 7½ % of the published price on the AWS. The offer was eventually declined by Ngugi who not only insisted on the 10% on the AWS paperback, but also asked for an extra £ 1,000 on his advance.<sup>18</sup> To these stubborn demands, Sambrook finally succumbed, though protesting that Ngugi would not gain much by having a rising royalty on the paperbacks edition.<sup>19</sup>

Having reached an agreement on the royalty terms, Currey sent the manuscript to William Heinemann seeking their decision to publish the hardback of the new novel.<sup>20</sup> William Heinemann in turn forwarded the manuscript to their reader, Moira Lynd, while HEB sent their copy to Richard Lister. Lynd’s report came on the 25<sup>th</sup> of February in favour of publication. There were several suggestions to remedy the novel’s weaknesses. “This book is a little bit long,” he wrote,

though hard to cut because the obvious places – flashbacks to the history of the various characters – are some of the best parts. The second chapter is the weakest. I won’t deny that I was sometimes held up by the multiplicity of African names. But in general I found this picture of a changing Kenya very fascinating. And most of the characters live, particularly some of the minor ones.... A very

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<sup>17</sup> Sambrook, London, to Ngugi, Nairobi, 3 February 1976, HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Sambrook, London, to Ngugi, Nairobi, 23 January 1976, HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading. Sambrook tried to explain his concern as follows: “This is bound to drive up the published prices. In our experience, this means sales resistance particularly in Africa. Of course when a title is a set book, you gain because sales reach maximum irrespective of price. But highly-priced books do not get set so often – exam boards watch these things more and more.” See also letter From Sambrook to Mark Houlton, 3 February, 1976, HEB 22/7 in which he asked the accountant to arrange an extra K£ 1,000 to be paid to Ngugi.

<sup>20</sup> Currey to Roger Smith, 11 February 1976, HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.



thorough polish is needed. I have done a good deal in the way of commas before vocatives and some spellings up to p200, but I found that the pace was slowing my ability to appreciate the book as a whole.<sup>21</sup>

On his part, Lister sent a meticulous report five weeks later. He appeared to have undertaken the reviewing with considerable zeal, and looking into the stylistic aspects of the novel which he felt were distracting the reader “from the excellence of the whole”.<sup>22</sup> He was particularly keen on deleting a series of redundant “‘now’s’ and ‘really’s’, and quite a few ‘then’s’, which seem to be slipped in as a matter of habit, convey nothing useful and interrupt the flow.”<sup>23</sup> Elsewhere he recommended the revision of numerous passages which did not appear to him “to be fictionally convincing.”<sup>24</sup> But apart from his focus on details of language, Lister’s main criticism was to do with the third quarter of the book which he considered was a bit of “a lag”, and where “the loss of momentum starts from a bit of an excess of words.”<sup>25</sup> The following passages expose the drift of his point:

P. 4 - you can’t shout ‘Disband the tyranny of foreign companies and their local lackeys!’ or ‘Out with foreign rule policed by colonised blackskins!’ The sentiments are unobjectionable; what I’m objecting to is that to say the workers shouted these phrases is artistically dishonest. They didn’t, and never have done, because they couldn’t; and any reader knows it. They would shout something shorter and less politically articulate.

P. 35 – Hallowed Ironmonger is quite fun but should the white people all have non-real names when the black people all have real ones? Could he be called ‘Hallowes’ which is a surname and could quite well be used as a first name?

P. 71 – The moon is BIG on this page and ‘new’ on pages 73 and 85. It hadn’t bothered me at all – to the extent that hadn’t noticed it – but it might be a good idea to ask the author if he prefers to alter it or leave it as it is.

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<sup>21</sup> Lynd, Report on *Petals of Blood*, 25 February 1976, HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>22</sup> Lister, Report on *Petals of Blood*, 30 March 1976, HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Lister, London, to Currey, London, 30 March 1976, HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

p. 221 – I feel that this whole section from p. 213 to 232 needs to be re-looked at. I can't make any positive suggestions as there's nothing wrong with it except that there's a sort of portentous drone in the writing that gets a bit oppressive. I think it needs to be rewritten a bit shorter and less stuffy. It's just a bit boring; and the rest of the book isn't. Nothing wrong with the material, only too many words.<sup>26</sup>

While these reports were in favour for publication, they presented Sambrook and Currey with an immediate problem, namely how to avoid Ngugi's possible immersion into an extensive and time-consuming revision of the novel, which they believed would be induced by the two reports. They decided to write a joint letter to Ngugi. But "the more I drafted" confessed Currey, "the more I worried that we should never see the manuscript again."<sup>27</sup> On reflection, they decided to send the reports to Chakava whom they urged to look through the numerous points raised by both Lynd and Lister and discuss only the valid points with the author. They even instructed Chakava to let Ngugi take away a copy of the pages where revision was needed.

There is only one section where Richard Lister suggests he should do some further work. Keith strongly agrees about this. I am less worried. If you see it delaying the book and you are afraid of letting Ngugi loose again then let's leave it to the reviewers to comment. I'm sorry to put the onus on you but I know how you had to bully him before to get him to leave the manuscript. I'm sure our tactics must be to avoid letting him get hold of the manuscript again. I am sending the manuscript under separate cover by registered second class airmail. This is of course the one and only edited copy (we have photocopies). However I think it is necessary for you to have to get final points attended to.<sup>28</sup>

When Chakava's response arrived two weeks later, it was to confirm the fears of Currey. The London reports had induced Ngugi's to undertake further revision, and seemed to corroborate similar points of criticism raised by the Kenyan reader, Jonathan Kariara. Ngugi, who thought his manuscript was completed and pretended to take little notice of

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<sup>26</sup> See Report by Lister.

<sup>27</sup> Currey, London, to Chakava, Nairobi, 27 April 1976, HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.



the critical comments of Kariara, had now a change of mind.<sup>29</sup> Anxiously waiting for his manuscript to arrive, Ngugi appeared now to be determined to revise the entire manuscript. Given these developments, Chakava observed that the idea of stopping the author from withdrawing his manuscript seemed to be definitely excluded.<sup>30</sup>

The delayed arrival of the only edited manuscript was unwelcome news for both Sambrook and Currey.<sup>31</sup> In his letter to Ngugi, Currey elucidated how the original schedule to publish the book in September 1976 was now “shot to bits.”<sup>32</sup> *Petals of Blood* was an important novel and demanded considerable publicity well in advance. In view of these pressures, Sambrook urged Ngugi in another letter to focus his attention on the points raised particularly by Lister and revise the manuscript according to the comments made so that its publishing could take place immediately.<sup>33</sup> Whereas these letters were intended to remind Ngugi of the long process the book would take before its materialisation, both Sambrook and Currey made certain to add some soothing remarks on the novel. “I know you will find it frustrating,” wrote Currey, “but *Petals of Blood* is going to be the major publishing occasion of the seventies in African writing and while it will get top priority it will take time.”<sup>34</sup> For Sambrook the book’s creation had been “lengthy and probably painful,” but he was quite confident that “it is the most important novel from an African writer since *Things Fall Apart*.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Chakava, Nairobi, to Currey, London, 14 May 1976, HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Currey, London, to Ngugi, Nairobi, 24 May 1976, HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>33</sup> Sambrook, London, to Ngugi, Nairobi, 24 May 1976, HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>34</sup> Currey, London, to Ngugi, Nairobi, 24 May 1976, HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>35</sup> Sambrook, London, to Ngugi, Nairobi, 24 May 1976, HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading. I described Sambrook’s comment as ‘soothing’ because he told me in person that he held *A Grain of Wheat* as his most accomplished novel.

As these letters were on their way to Ngugi, the long-expected manuscript arrived with “the envelope completely torn and dog-eared.”<sup>36</sup> Ngugi suspected that it had been sabotaged and read by the authorities. Driven by desire to address the weaknesses of his novel, he withdrew the manuscript and worked hard to bring it to a satisfactory condition.<sup>37</sup> The expectation that Ngugi would take long to revise the manuscript proved to be too pessimistic. In fact, he was able to hand over the final manuscript to Chakava two weeks later, just in time when the latter was to leave for London on the 20<sup>th</sup> of June.<sup>38</sup>

There were reasons for Ngugi’s swift revision. He had started re-examining the novel long before he received the edited manuscript from London or any of the readers’ reports. The alterations he had made were not drastic and did not affect the overall structure or ‘thrust’ of the novel. He had made substantial additions, cut down some passages, inserted a few more details to indicate the passage of time and clarify particular references to Kenya’s modern history.<sup>39</sup> Still the strong inducement for him remained the necessity of the novel to appear in September 1976. The reason for which he had set this strict deadline of three months can not be resolved easily. One may recall in this respect his own confession to Sambrook in June that “the book had such a weight” on him and that he “should not really be very free to start on other things until the novel was finally out and away from [his] hands and mind”.<sup>40</sup> Such an explanation betrays his impatience and anxiety to see particular attention given to the novel by his publishers. They had already produced seven of his books and were thoroughly familiar with the growing reputation he

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<sup>36</sup> Chakava, Nairobi, to Currey, London, 2 June, 1976 HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Chakava, to Currey, 10 June 1976, HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>39</sup> Ngugi, Nairobi, to Sambrook and Currey, London, 11 June 1976, HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading. It is not known where the manuscript (s) of *Petals of Blood* is. Carol Sicherman who had written extensively and compiled two important reference books on Ngugi could only locate the manuscripts of *Weep Not, Child*, *A Grain of Wheat*, *Homecoming* and *Secret Lives*, which are all housed at the SOAS library.

<sup>40</sup> Ngugi, Nairobi, to Sambrook, London, 21 June 1976, HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading. It is quite intriguing that whenever financial matters or particular personal requests were the subject, Ngugi addressed them to Sambrook.



had acquired as a prolific and successful African writer. He too was well aware of his growing success and demanded a special treatment. More than ever, he required that particular consideration be given to the format and appearance of the book especially when its complex structure and considerable length could be discouraging for the reader.

Although he was able to reassure the author that HEB would set deadlines for the publishing of both hardback and paperback copies, Currey had to let Ngugi in on the facts to which he seemed to be indifferent. The promotion of a major book like *Petals of Blood* dictated wide publicity extending over a period of three months. But this was not all. Because Chakava was determined to give the novel a proper launch in Nairobi and Higo wanted to “give it a big push in Nigeria,” shipping orders of copies from London had to be made through pre-shipment inspection which notoriously was slow and unpredictable. Currey did not miss a chance to explain in sympathetic words the complicated process of making the book available to readers both in England and Africa. He also reminded Ngugi that precipitated publishing as he demanded may result in “rushing a major book to disaster.”<sup>41</sup> Currey’s warning did not go, as in many similar preceding situations, without a reassuring phrase: “I see it as the most important publishing occasion of the 70’s and even more important than the achievement of the first hundred titles in the African Writers Series.”<sup>42</sup>

The judgement of whether or not *Petals of Blood* was the major African literary publishing event of the seventies should have been left to literary critics, book historians or even accountants to decide. However, Currey’s subjective statement, above all, reveals the development which Ngugi’s relation with HEB had seen since the early seventies. One could understand why Ngugi became rather intractable in his claims when his books had attained such spectacular success. It is equally comprehensible that HEB should become exceedingly considerate and even conceding with one of their best selling African authors.

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<sup>41</sup> Currey, London, to Ngugi, Nairobi, 29 June 1976 HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

From negotiating contracts, to dictating his own royalty terms and finally to indicating how his book should receive a special production attention, Ngugi seemed to be increasingly pushing the usual boundaries back and driving his editors to consult him about the details of his book's publishing development. It became normal in such a situation for Currey, for instance, to send a draft blurb and biography which were intended for the hardcover edition of *Petals of Blood* for the author to do whatever he wished with. Currey even asked Ngugi's opinion about the blurb and biography shortened for the AWS edition.<sup>43</sup> Ngugi was not totally content with the draft he had received, and complained that his publishers were trying to turn "the great socialist novel he set out to write" into a mystery thriller. He went as far as to say that a blurb which did not say that "this novel is an indictment of Modern capitalism in Kenya" had missed the intention of his book.<sup>44</sup> Ngugi said that his editors "should be able to produce an acceptable blurb."<sup>45</sup> This is quite clear from the published blurb itself where the story of the novel's characters was put in a context of class struggle, and the masses against neo-colonialism as follows:

there is the changing balance of social forces in the village under a new capitalism; there is the history of past struggles against colonial domination and oppression; and there are peoples' continuing strivings against a more severe and deadly exploitation by an alliance of foreigners and the class of the newly-propertied Africans.<sup>46</sup>

By late October, Ngugi was sent the proofs for *Petals of Blood* and was asked to mark any corrections he might have and post them back to London by 22<sup>nd</sup> of November.<sup>47</sup> During the next five weeks Ngugi made, beside numerous corrections which were of minor nature, one major addition which occurred in Chapter 13. Because he was concerned with balance

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<sup>43</sup> Currey, London, to Chakava, Nairobi, 2 August 1976, HEB 4/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>44</sup> Chakava, Nairobi, to Currey, London, 11 August 1976, HEB 14/7. , SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> See the Blurb of *Petals of Blood*'s 1977 edition.

<sup>47</sup> Ingrid Crewdson, London, to Ngugi, Nairobi, 26 October 1976, HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.



and rhythm, he had felt all along that something vital was missing with the disappearance of Inspector Godfrey, and so he added sub-section One of Chapter Thirteen. The revision of the proofs was also another occasion for Ngugi to show his discontent about “the fact that chapters run into one another –it makes the whole novel look so crowded and dense.”<sup>48</sup> On the 6<sup>th</sup> of December, he passed on the proofs to Chakava to be forwarded to London. Chakava, who was generally impressed with the way Ngugi had restrained his pen, also forwarded together with the manuscript Ngugi’s new photograph and communicated the author’s concern over the issue of name(s) on the cover of *Petals of Blood*. HEB had planned to put only Ngugi as the name of the author on the cover. The author, however insisted that wa Thiong’o should remain albeit in small print on the cover. Leaving it out altogether, in his view, would not only confuse readers, “but would also delay recognition of this change.”<sup>49</sup>

While these finishing touches of the book’s appearance were soon made to accommodate Ngugi’s wishes, a final production schedule was unveiled and put into action. Once revises of the corrected pages were received on the 25<sup>th</sup> February 1977, HEB was able to give the print order (how many copies) on 2<sup>nd</sup> March with a delivery date for paperback copies on 31<sup>st</sup> March and the cased and wrapped copies on 22<sup>nd</sup> April. The UK sales department took two months after the delivery of the finished copies for promotion before the simultaneous publication of the hardback and paperback, a date of which was finally set on 27<sup>th</sup> June.<sup>50</sup> As Ngugi’s embarked on his visit to London for the launch of the novel, Currey and Alan Greene took immediate steps to mount a publicity campaign to promote the book.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ngugi, Nairobi, to Currey, London, 6 December 1976, HEB 14/7. See also letter from Chakava to Currey, 7<sup>th</sup> December 1976 HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>49</sup> Chakava, Nairobi, to Currey, London, 17 December 1976, HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>50</sup> Sambrook, London, to Ngugi, Nairobi, 17 February 1977, HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>51</sup> Memo from Currey to Hill, Chakava and Sambrook, 9 May 1977, HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading. They despatched copies to various leading newspapers’ literary editors, BBC radios, and

Much to their disappointment Sambrook and Currey, who were already engaged in their campaign, received the news that Ngugi had chosen to celebrate the publication of the novel in Nairobi, not incidentally, programmed on the same day. Such a turn of event caused a great inconvenience for Sambrook and Currey who tried to persuade both Ngugi and Chakava to defer the Nairobi book launch. Their main concern was that there would not be substantial copies of the book in Kenya by the 27<sup>th</sup> of June. Although they were sending off small quantities by bulk post, such a method of despatch which was permitted under import/exchange control regulations was not particularly fast and could only be used for a limited number of copies. For the larger bulk of ordered copies there was the usual process of going through the formal pre-shipment inspection routines. Thus, in order to increase the number of bulk post parcels getting through, Sambrook suggested a Nairobi launching in the third or fourth week of July. He also indicated that this would fit in with Currey's plans as he would make an editorial/publishing visit to Nairobi and would be delighted to time this in order to attend the launching, on behalf of HEB London.<sup>52</sup>

Against this scheme, Ngugi insisted that HEB Kenya should go ahead with its publication date and argued that the presence of Currey was desirable but not essential. He felt that there was "something right and proper" about simultaneous launching in London and Nairobi, as "the Nairobi launching is the more important one and should not come later than the London launching." Writing to Currey and Sambrook about Ngugi's resolve to carry out his intention, Chakava made certain to explain that they, in Nairobi, could not change their date because Mwai Kibaki, the then Minister for Finance and Planning, had accepted their invitation to be the Guest of Honour at Nairobi's launch on the 27<sup>th</sup> June. Choosing a Guest of Honour, confessed Chakava, was a head-scratching exercise as Ngugi

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bookshops. The hardcover copies were sent to Adolf Woods (*Time Literary Supplement*), Angus Calder (*The Scotsman*), Tony Gould (*New Society*), John Whitney (*Sunday Times*); David Lytton (Radio Three – Review talk), Libby Spurrier (Radio Four - Kaleidoscope), Florence Akst (BBC African Service). The paperback copies were sent simultaneously to *The Observer*, *The Guardian*, *Times Educational Supplement*, and *West Africa* among others. Special Bookshop promotion was done at Collets and Dillons.

<sup>52</sup> Sambrook, London, to Ngugi, Nairobi, 20 May 1977, HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading. Sambrook and Currey received the "disappointing" news that Ngugi had decided on the 9 of May.



had almost objected to all the names suggested to him except that of Kibaki whom he considered to be an “intellectual with considerable sympathy towards writers.”<sup>53</sup> Moreover, Chakava, having invited three hundred guests was worried that there might not be enough copies for everyone during the day of launching. To remedy this, he proposed that Currey dispatch by air some three hundred copies. Not only did Chakava suggest that the cost of airfreight be part of the launching costs, but also requested that HEB London consider meeting half of the cost.<sup>54</sup> These urgent demands were soon fulfilled, and Currey arrived in Nairobi on the 21<sup>st</sup>. It is interesting to note that the trip which Ngugi was supposed to make to the metropolitan city to celebrate the publication of his own book was now substituted by a visit which Currey undertook as a representative of HEB London in the Nairobi lunching party.<sup>55</sup>

The day of celebration of *Petals of Blood* was an occasion for the various individuals who contributed to the production of the novel to come together and have a toast in honour of Ngugi. It was also an event of symbolic implications. The presence of politicians, representatives of multinational companies, academics, writers, journalists, beside the attendance of members of Ngugi’s village “who drank quite well,[...] sang and ululated and laughed” reflected a striking image of the various characters of *Petals of Blood* coming together to celebrate the end of their performances of the story’s themes, plot and dialogues. Having left the stage, these actors’ meeting seemed a suitable moment to celebrate the completion of the story. Was Ngugi then unconsciously trying to bring different social classes under one roof to celebrate a novel preoccupied with the power relations between these social classes? Reflecting on the occasion few years later, Ngugi admitted that “it was not obvious at the time, but now, in retrospect, that event was

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<sup>53</sup> Chakava, Nairobi, to Currey, London, 25 May 1977, HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading. For example Ngugi suggested that the money HEB intended to spend on his air fare and upkeep should be re-channelled to the Nairobi launching party.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Chakava, Nairobi, to Currey, London, 3 June 1977, HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

explosively political or rather it launched the novel into the centre of post-colonial politics in Kenya.”<sup>56</sup> Leaving aside the Kenyan political scene in the late 1970s, the Nairobi launch represented an emotional ‘homecoming’ for Ngugi as the celebration site in Nairobi was only thirty Kilometres from his home town, Limuru, surrounded by his own kinsmen and attended by his illiterate mother.

Following the ceremony, favourable reviews started to feature in Kenyan magazine and newspapers. *The Weekly Review*, for instance, regarded *Petals of Blood* as Ngugi’s “crowning literary achievement” which not only surpassed his previous efforts in the construction of the plot’s details, dramatisation and characterisation, but was also “a deeply disturbing mind-blowing political statement, an anguished cry of despair at the way things are going in Kenya; a bombshell.”<sup>57</sup> The British press likewise made favourable reviews of the novel. One of these reviews noted that Ngugi’s work was “subtly and idiosyncratically written, neither truckling to nor scorning the norms of English prose and yet with many a felicitous and unselfconscious innovation”. The novel, reported *The Sunday Times*, was a very remarkable novel that reflected a fine author who “writes with passion about every form, shape and colour which power can take.”<sup>58</sup> *The Guardian*, found that “the complex shifts in time and narrative technique provide an impressively complex view of a Kenya.”<sup>59</sup> *The Scotsman*, in turn, praised Ngugi for having produced “the most ambitious novel yet realised in Black Africa.”<sup>60</sup> *The New Society* announced that *Petals of Blood* was a very constructive work in the sense that no one could read it without learning much about the African dilemma which also happened to be the western one: “No decent

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<sup>56</sup> Ngugi, *Writers in Politics*, (Oxford: James Currey, 1997), p.83.

<sup>57</sup> See *The Weekly Review*, 27.7.77.

<sup>58</sup> See Christopher Ricks: *The Sunday Times*, 26.6.77.

<sup>59</sup> See C.J. Driver: *The Guardian*, 30.6.77.

<sup>60</sup> See Angus Calder: *The Scotsman*, 23 7.77.



Briton, certainly, could read Ngugi's novel without shame and disquiet – both for its angry glances at the past, and for its passionate glare at the present.”<sup>61</sup>

The outcome of this wide publicity that HEB (UK) and HEB (EA) had made for the novel was an immense success. Within four months of its publication, the novels sold 10,000 copies. The successful launch of the novel also drove Ngugi to engage more effectively with other ambitious projects of similar critical and satirical nature that attempted at exposing the corrupted Kenyan political, social and economic landscape. Such an “engagement” soon alerted the government's officials to the growing danger of his voice. Instead of censoring his books, Ngugi was detained on 31 December 1977, six months after the publication of *Petals of Blood*.

## -II-

Official reasons for Ngugi's detention have not been clearly defined. Many commentators, including Ngugi himself, however, have attributed his detention to the radical tone of *Petals of Blood* and to the staging of *Ngaahika Ndeenda*. Ngugi's incarceration was indeed a severe form of censorship, by which the political forces he condemned in his writing were able to respond by a mere act of physical detention. This section's point is to highlight this particular phase of Ngugi's literary production since it remains a clear junction, if not the climax of his creative writing and his publishing account.

In October 1975 following his return from Yalta, where he had spent a month in the Soviet Writers Union's guesthouse working on what then seemed a completed manuscript of *Petals of Blood*,<sup>62</sup> Ngugi forwarded to Sambrook and Currey another

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<sup>61</sup> Edward Blishen: *New Society*, 21.7.77.

<sup>62</sup> Sambrook, London, to Ngugi, Nairobi, 8 October 1975, HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading. Sambrook explained that when a clean and final manuscript was all set the process would take some twelve months before the date of publication. Such an interval would include correction and return of proofs, and two to three month period “between receipt of bound copies and publication date in order to give [their]

manuscript. This was a play Ngugi wrote with Micere Githae Mugo about the legendary Dedan Kimathi, the Mau Mau leader who had been arrested and hanged by the colonial government in 1958. The environment in which the idea of writing such a play emerged was significant with regard to the context of events on the Kenyan Theatre scene. Six months earlier, a play written by Kenneth Watene entitled *Dedan Kimathi* had been performed at the National Theatre in Nairobi. Adopted from Ian Henderson's book entitled *The Hunt for Kimathi*, the play depicted Kimathi "as an emotional, murderous, lusty terrorist, built up and destroyed in a Macbeth-Othello type fashion."<sup>63</sup> Although the play received then very hostile press reviews, it was well attended and went on non-stop for three weeks. It was during one of the performances that both Mugo and Ngugi were reported to have walked off and "swore that they would write a play which would restore Kimathi's historical role as a dare-devil freedom fighter,"<sup>64</sup> a hero and patriot of Kenya's independence. This was partly due to their desire to put the record right, but more immediately to stop Watene's play from being entered and performed at the All Africa Arts Festival in Lagos by presenting a 'better alternative'.<sup>65</sup>

Fully in sympathy with Ngugi's reaction to the Watene's play and his reasons for writing his own with Micere Mugo, Sambrook was altogether in favour of publication. While he thought that Ngugi and Mugo's play had "far greater theatrical possibilities"<sup>66</sup> than Watene's, he had reservations not only about Ian Henderson appearing as a character by name, but he realised that a great deal of what the authors had put into Henderson's mouth came verbatim from *The Hunt for Dedan Kimathi*.<sup>67</sup> "I feel we are possibly playing with

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publicity people and [...] home and overseas trade departments sufficient time to publicise and promote the hardback properly."

<sup>63</sup> Chakava, Nairobi, to Sambrook, London, 14 November 1975, HEB 22/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Chakava, Nairobi, to Sambrook, London, 14 November 1975, HEB 22/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>66</sup> Currey, London, to Chakava, Nairobi, 8 December 1975, HEB 22/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>67</sup> Sambrook, London, to Ngugi, Nairobi, 24 December, 1975, HEB 22/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.



fire,” explained Sambrook, “it all depends of course on how Henderson now sees the past, but there is no doubt at all that your presentation of his character could be regarded as defamatory.”<sup>68</sup> Ngugi was thrilled by the news of HEB’s quick decision to accept *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* for publication in the AWS. However, the various comments he had received from Sambrook, friends and colleagues pointing out certain weaknesses of the manuscript prompted him to revise the whole play with his co-author, making it clear to his publishers that he wanted the play to be produced on stage first before it was published.<sup>69</sup> For their part, his publishers were thinking of the appropriate way for bringing the play out. Although there was a discouraging tendency on the part of HEB to publish single-plays, both Currey and Sambrook agreed that Ngugi’s name “could always be an exception.” Given that the play was going to be of immense interest in East Africa, Currey proposed HEB (East Africa) should originate the publication and bring out the play in a special edition in the first instance before it was put into the AWS. Not only was the scheme to ensure that copies of the play would be available locally soon after publication or in conjunction with the first stage performance, but also it opened the opportunity for HEB (East Africa) to contribute their first title to the Series.

During his business trip to London in June 1976 intended to negotiate the publishing of *Petals of Blood*, Chakava sought to discuss the arrangements over the publication of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* too in the AWS. It was agreed during his meeting with Sambrook and Currey that HEB East Africa would handle the East African market of the play, while HEB London would have world rights, excluding East Africa and, therefore, a separate contract with the authors. The fact that Chakava had offered Ngugi an advance of £500 and a royalty of 10% on the East African published price of the play induced HEB London to draw their contract on the same lines – a royalty of 10% of

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Chakava, Nairobi, to Sambrook, London, 5 December, 1975, HEB 22/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading. Edward Thompson read and liked the play which he said was very powerful and much better than Watene’s play, His own criticism was that he regards the instructions to the actors as “overdone – maybe useful but irritating to read.” Sambrook felt that such instructions got in the way of the action.

the UK published price and an advance of £670 payable on signature and split between the two authors.<sup>70</sup> The proposed plan seemed to suit Chakava who, upon his return to Nairobi, seemed to be rushing with the production of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. From Chakava's letters to Sambrook, Currey and Higo, one could sense that his enthusiasm for this particular book was rather unusual. Perhaps his passion stemmed from his awareness that the play not only symbolized a defining moment in Ngugi's writing, but also, in publishing terms, the shift of the production of Ngugi's work from the metropolitan publishing centre to an African based branch was an innovative step.

Not only was the play an occasion for Chakava to undertake the producing of a book by a Kenyan writer of international reputation without having to be instructed from London, but it also came at a point when his imminent rise in office as the first Kenyan Directing Manager of HEB (EA) coincided with a general prospect of 'nationalising' the production of Kenyan literature.<sup>71</sup> As an editor-in-training and later Chief Publishing Editor under the directorship of both David Hill and Bob Markham, Chakava's involvement in publishing African writers had been mainly related to "receiving, evaluating and selecting material for publication in Heinemann's London-based African Writers Series," publishing translations of some of the AWS titles into Swahili, and liaising between HEB London and East African authors such as Meja Mwangi, Samuel Kahiga, and Mwangi Ruheni.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Currey, London, to Ngugi and Micere, Nairobi, 8 July 1976, HEB 22/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading. He explained the terms as follows: "They [HEB East Africa] will pay you a royalty for the copies they sell, and have agreed to your £500 advance. HEB normal royalty for AWS titles is 7 ½ on the UK published price We would therefore be willing to consider an advance of royalty on the Dedan Kamahi play related to the print number and UK and East African published prices. I don't know how many copies HEB (EA) would think of first time around but, taking the Black Hermit as a guide, I reckon we could do a first printing of 7,000 or 8,000 in the AWS for other markets."

<sup>71</sup> After two years working in partnership with Chakava, David Hill returned to London in 1974, leaving Chakava in command of the company's local publishing – which had now taken root. In 1976 Bob Markham himself returned to London, and the following year Chakava succeeded him as managing director of HEB East Africa Ltd.

<sup>72</sup> Chakava, "Publishing Ngugi: The Challenge, the Risk, and the Reward," in *Critical Essays on Ngugi wa Thingo*, ed. Peter Nazareth (New York: Twayne Publishers, 2000), p.322.



The rise in office gave Chakava a chance to be part of a larger movement that aimed at localizing the publishing programmes. Chakava explained later in an article published for the first time in 1995 how the “great literature debate” that Ngugi initiated in the University of Nairobi’s Department of English in the late 1960s made a considerable impact on other educational institutions. At a conference of teachers of literature held in Nairobi in 1974, Ngugi and his colleagues voiced their desire to influence secondary school teachers to work towards placing African literature at the core of secondary school literature curriculum. Whereas the conference recommended setting up new syllabus, the Ministry of Education was reluctant to adopt a firm policy with regards to carrying out such a proposal. It was such a reluctance that caused Ngugi to keep “constantly reminding [Chakava] of the need to localize [his] publishing program to fulfil better the needs of the new curriculum and to show everybody that “it can be done”.<sup>73</sup>

In the same article, Chakava, rather in a complacent, self-rewarding way, denied the fact that it was Currey who suggested to him the idea of originating the play. Against the existing records, he claimed that he was the one who decided to publish *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* after HEB London *declined* to co-publish the play because “the African Writers Series was supposed to be for anthologies, and not single collections of plays.”<sup>74</sup> He stated that HEB London were soon to realise “their mistake and eventually purchased rights from me to sell the play outside East Africa.”<sup>75</sup> Was Chakava trying to project his life-time career into a context of a national project advocated by certain Kenyan intellectuals like Ngugi or was he just trying to align his job as a publisher with that of Ngugi as a writer? In both cases, Chakava’s distortion could only be attributed to his proclivity to make of his publishing of the play a historical event that marked not only the

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<sup>73</sup> Chakava, “Publishing Ngugi: The Challenge, the Risk, and the Reward,” p. 322.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p.327.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p.328.

beginnings of HEB Kenya's transformation but also that of Ngugi. In his own words, this period

witnessed a transformation in the author/publisher relationship that had existed between Ngugi, Heinemann London and Heinemann Kenya, and finally the transformation of Heinemann Kenya itself into an independent African imprint with the new name of East African Educational Publishers.<sup>76</sup>

These transformations did not happen without the assistance of HEB London. Sambrook and Currey were keen to support Chakava in his endeavour to set up local publishing. The case of *The Trail of Dedan Kimathi* was an obvious example. Currey, who had suggested that Chakava should originate the play, also suggested that HEB London should share the cost with HEB Kenya of the publishing of the play by paying an offset fee of half the setting costs and print their (HEB LONDON) copies in Britain.<sup>77</sup> Chakava, however, was disappointed to know of such a plan and complained that this was "where reciprocity seem[ed] to work only one way."<sup>78</sup> Eventually Currey ordered 5000 copies of the play when Higo was reluctant to take no more than 50 copies; a number that was later raised to 250 after Currey's intervention.

The enthusiasm of Chakava for *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* perhaps stemmed from strong nationalistic feelings. Not only was the play the first work he published, but it was also a work that exhibited an extraordinary combination of national kenyan 'products'.<sup>79</sup> In a letter to Higo, Chakava was able to boast of the surprising public demand that led to repeat performances of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and of its uplifting sales:

For the first time, the African in this part of the world has come to realise the relevance and meaning of cultural independence. You will

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Sambrook, London, Chakava, Nairobi, 7 October, 1976, HEB 22/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>78</sup> Currey, "Africa Writes Back", p.130 (Manuscript).

<sup>79</sup> The authors, the text and its content and themes, the publisher and the production of the book, the theatre and its audience were all Kenyans.



realise that you West Africans are far more advanced in this area of authentic African theatre than we are.<sup>80</sup>

The performance of the play, however, did not pass by without difficulties. Ngugi was to relate years later how the work, which was supposed to celebrate Kenya's struggle for independence was reluctantly allowed a venue in The Kenya National Theatre. The irony was that *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* had been selected by a committee of the Ministry of Social to represent Kenya in the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts (FESTAC'77) organised in Lagos. The institution which was supposed to present Kenyan drama was, according to Ngugi, reserved to Europeans.

The management, which was almost entirely composed of Europeans and whose members were linked to the major European amateur and semiprofessional groups, told us quite literally that there was no room at the inn! But this was in 1976, 13 years after formal independence under the presidency of Jomo Kenyatta! We drew their attention to the symbolism of the event: the dignity of Kenya before the world; the fact that Kenyans needed to see the play before it went to Lagos; and surely, apart from anything else, Kenyans needed to remind themselves that their in- dependence was won through sweat and blood and the deaths of many! No room at the inn.<sup>81</sup>

"The Ministry," explained Ngugi, "probably embarrassed by press notices that a Kenyan play had been handcuffed on Kenyatta Day, intervened" only to allow the Drama Group a short time of four nights to present their work in the said theatre. Sooner after, Ngugi and the director of the play, Seth Adagala, "were called to CID headquarters and were specifically warned against interfering with European Theatre."<sup>82</sup>

As it turned out, the idea of creating a 'travelling theatre' emerged. "Why quarrel over a building anyway?"<sup>83</sup> Asked Ngugi. He soon became involved in the Kamiriithu Community Education and Cultural Centre, of which he was elected the chairman. Along

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<sup>80</sup> Chakava, Nairobi, to Higo, Ibadan, 8 December 1976, HEB 22/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>81</sup> Ngugi, *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedom*, (London: James Currey, 1993), pp. 92-3.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

with Ngugi wa Mirii, Ngugi was commissioned by the Centre to write a play, *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, later translated as *I Will Marry When I want*. Its performance seems to have culminated in his detention. But the story did not end there. His persistent tendency to write about the failure of the political establishment would bring about new works. By the time of his detention, Ngugi had already been of writing a novel, the account of which is the subject of the following section.

### -III-

By January 1977, Ngugi had already started writing a new novel under two provisional titles: 'Devil at the Cross' and 'Devil's Angels.'<sup>84</sup> Having been a third of the way through, he described it as the fastest novel he had ever written, and his last in the English language. Ngugi was able to give Currey a fair idea about his latest project as follows:

The novel plays around the Faustus theme: it is about a woman, who, to get wealthy in a money based society (i.e. in a society where one's status is determined by the size of one's pocket), sells her soul to the Devil. She is then given the secret of five ways of making it to the top which, of course, she utilises with consequences that will be examined in the novel. The whole manuscript should be ready by the end of June, at the very latest, but I am hoping sooner. It is coming on well, and it will have been the first novel which I shall have written in the head, so to speak, before putting it on paper. It is very character based and it is also full of action. So with the main emphasis being on character and action, the woman will be at the centre of the novel. I am sure you will probably find it interesting – at least I am enjoying writing it.<sup>85</sup>

The letter's purpose was to see if HEB were interested in signing a contract. More importantly, it sought to justify a call for an early advance of £3,750 on the novel. For both

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<sup>84</sup>Ngugi, Nairobi, to Sambrook, London, 19 January, 1977, HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading. "I am more involved in 'Devil at/on the Cross' about which I have already written to Currey with a copy to you. I am now in the Fourth Chapter – it is coming on well and I hope to complete it, certainly by June this year." It was Sambrook who suggested the preposition 'On' in the title and recommended *Devil on the Cross* to be the title of the novel. We are all delighted to know that *Devil On the Cross* (prefer 'on' to 'at' don't you?) is moving along fast. Since the early novels, this is the first work that's gone so well in the early stages, isn't it? See Sambrook, to Ngugi, 25 January, 1977, HEB 14/7.

<sup>85</sup> Ngugi, Nairobi, to Currey, London, 10 January, 1977, HEB 27/8, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.



Currey and Sambrook this was “magnificent news”<sup>86</sup>. They seemed to be contented to see one of their best-selling African authors maintaining a ‘natural publishing rhythm’. With *Petals of Blood* then ready to be published in five months, their enthusiasm was intertwined with Ngugi’s hope to see the publication date of the latter as “the beginning of the publication plans” for *Devil on the Cross*. Their interest expressed itself in Currey giving instructions on 28 January 1977 for the advance of £ 3,750 to be paid over to Ngugi. The supposedly smooth transaction, however, was not made on time as Ngugi was hoping to.<sup>87</sup> The money, explained Sambrook, was “in the hand of the banks,”<sup>88</sup> but Ngugi was desperate for cash and apparently the delay exacerbated his financial needs. There is no evident justification in the archives of HEB for such a delay. Similarly, there is no explanation for HEB increasing their advance to £5,400. All that is known to us is a memo from Hill to the HEB accountant, Mark Houlton, dated 28<sup>th</sup> February asking him to “arrange for the payment of £5,400 to Ngugi wa Thiong’o being the advance for [...] *Devil [on] the Cross*.”<sup>89</sup> The title was straightaway scheduled as the 200<sup>th</sup> volume in the AWS.<sup>90</sup> The book project, however, was put on hold as Ngugi was detained.

Soon after his release, Ngugi was eager to complete such a project which had now taken a different form. Thus, by the end of May 1979, he completed the writing of *Caitani Mutharaba-Ini* and submitted the script of *Ngaahika Ndeenda* to HEB East Africa for their assessment. Chakava, on his part, broke the news to Sambrook in London. His letter raised several questions that needed urgent answers. Ngugi had asked Chakava if his publishers would be prepared to meet the typing costs of the novel as well as reimbursing him for the

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<sup>86</sup> Hill, London, to Ngugi, Nairobi, 28 January 1977, HEB 27/8, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>87</sup> Sambrook, London, to Ngugi, Nairobi, 17 February 1977, HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading. See Ngugi to Sambrook, 22 February, 1977, HEB 27/8, SC, Uni., of R, Reading, where he wrote: “I’ve not yet received the advance on ‘Devil on the Cross’! you perhaps see where the hitch is as I would have liked to get the money this month of February.!!”

<sup>88</sup> Sambrook, London, to Ngugi, Nairobi, 17 February 1977, HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>89</sup> Hill, London, to Mark Houlton, 28 February 1977, HEB 27/8, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>90</sup> Sambrook, London, to Ngugi, Nairobi, 20 May 1977, HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

typing charges of the play. Although unable to take an immediate and final decision, Chakava's familiarity with Ngugi's financial difficulties seemed to call for a positive response to Ngugi's demands. The point of whether to publish or not, he explained, "[had] already been overtaken by events and we just have got to brace ourselves for the moment of truth."<sup>91</sup> What was vital for Chakava was the need to know whether Ngugi's new book projects "should be approached as joint Nairobi/ London projects, Nairobi only projects or London only projects so that the necessary contracts can be prepared accordingly."<sup>92</sup> The writer, being a full-time writer and in a difficult financial position, warned Chakava, would be expecting higher advances than what he had been previously offered.<sup>93</sup>

Sambrook's response was immediate. HEB London had paid an advance of £5,400 and prepared a contract for the English edition of *Devil on the Cross*. This, however, was still unsigned as it had been drawn up just before Ngugi's detention. Given that Ngugi's emphasis that the Gikuyu edition should be published first, Sambrook outlined the steps that HEB London and HEB EA should take in order to fulfil the author's wish. He suggested that HEB EA should sign its contract with Ngugi for the Gikuyu edition and while HEB London another for the English language edition. Sambrook advised that the strategy for publication would be to bring out before anything else the Gikuyu edition of the novel, *Caitani Mutharaba-Ini*. The rationale was to avoid any provocation of the Kenyan authorities in case HEB EA published first the Gikuyu edition of the play, *Ngaahika Ndeenda*. Publishing the play simultaneously with the novel or shortly afterwards, in Sambrook words, would possibly make the novel "draw any fire away from publication of the play." Yet, he warned that "being his publisher will no doubt cause us

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<sup>91</sup> Chakava, Nairobi, to Sambrook and Currey, London, 30 May, 1979, HEB 30/2, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.



some awkward moments from now on but we shall retain the most important writer in Africa on our list.”<sup>94</sup>

With such an assertion, the underlined pride it evoked and the broad policy Sambrook outlined, Chakava started making the necessary arrangements to publish both the novel and the play. At once, he secured two readers reports for *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, one by Simon Gikandi and other by Johnson<sup>95</sup> and “a detailed almost scene by scene summary”<sup>96</sup> in English of the play arranged by Ngugi for the benefit of his publishers, who were illiterate in Gikuyu. As he moved to discuss the royalty terms with the two authors, Chakava had to exert his diplomatic skills in order not to succumb to their financial demands. The subject was not an easy matter. The fact that they were both unemployed made it hard for Chakava to get them to accept an advance of Shs. 20,000, to be equally split. However reluctant the two ‘Ngugis’ were in accepting the ‘modest’ advance, they decided to grant HEB (EA) world rights on the Gikuyu and Kiswahili editions as well as Eastern Africa rights for the English language edition. They also offered HEB London the option to take commonwealth rights excluding East Africa, and retained the US rights. They also insisted that all translation rights of the two books be handled by HEB (EA). Chakava’s major concern was to do with the setting as the orthography the two ‘Ngugis’ used was complicated, “with too many tildes,” confessed Chakava, “[it would] prove difficult to find a printer with all the required matrices.” The writers, however, maintained that it was “only through use of such devices that African languages [would make] a bit of a sense.” Chakava discussion with the authors seems to have brought about some positive conclusions. They all agreed to publish the Gikuyu edition of both the play and the novel simultaneously. The idea became an incentive for Chakava to think of launching the two books “in a series, say the African languages Series, and I am sure the authorities will

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<sup>94</sup> Sambrook, London, to Chakava, Nairobi, 15 June 1979, HEB 27/8, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>95</sup> No other name is given.

<sup>96</sup> Chakava, Nairobi, to Sambrook and Currey, London, 6 July 1979, HEB 27/8, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

appreciate this as a policy decision rather than a deliberate attempt to embarrass them with this one play.”<sup>97</sup>

In the process of preparing the agreement contracts, a confusion arose as to who control the rights of *Devil on the Cross*. The correspondence between the two companies conveyed the impression that the London office was rather the originating publisher of the novel, having offered Ngugi an advance of £5,400 prior to his detention. Currey, for instance, was comfortable discussing the two projects and the way to draw up the contracts. He decided to have four contracts on each of the two books.<sup>98</sup> The response of Chakava was rather defensive if not suspicious. The two manuscripts which were now under discussion were written and completed in Gikuyu. Not only was he “puzzled” by the four contracts on each title, but he also suspected that HEB London were trying to control all the rights on the Ngugi’s forthcoming books.

I must confess that I am a bit puzzled by all these contracts..... It is important to realize that HEB (EA) Ltd. Is the originating publisher of both *Ngaahika Ndeenda* and *the Devil on the Cross*. By this token, HEB (EA) Ltd. should be the company handling translation rights. I can only assume that in the case of these various contracts you have drawn, you are simply acting on our behalf. But if the intention is to control translation rights, then I would object very strongly. Without the extra revenue from rights and permissions, I do not think we would consider the two projects viable in kikuyu and Kiswahili alone. Consequently, the investment and security risks we are taking would appear unjustified. I therefore do not think that the addition (“in African languages if sub-contracted to another publisher”) in the present HEB (EA) Ltd. contracts is necessary. Neither do I think it is necessary to prepare so many contracts, specifying the language edition in each. As the originating publishers, it will be our job to consider and grant applications for translation rights, on behalf of the author.... I shall not hand over these contracts to Ngugi until you have specified whether they have been prepared in your interest or ours.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Chakava, Nairobi, to Sambrook, London, 6 July 1979, HEB 27/8, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>98</sup> Beside two English language contracts, one for the AWS and the other for the HEB East African English edition, the two companies, particularly HEB EA, decided to produce the a Kiswahili edition beside the evident original texts of *Ngaahika Ndeenda*.

<sup>99</sup> Chakava, Nairobi, to Currey, London, 22 August 1979 HEB 27/8, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.



Such confusion seemed to be clarified when Amy Hoff, the Rights and Contracts Manager, specified that the contracts which HEB London wanted Ngugi to sign were those related to the AWS edition of both the novel and the play. Others were intended to highlight difference between the various East African editions and help Chakava deal with the new situation which the author's shift to write in Gikuyu had created.<sup>100</sup> Such clarification seemed comforting to Chakava who returned the four contracts signed by the author a month later. Yet, his letter was also designed to communicate a couple of points which Ngugi wanted to put across to his publishers in London.

- 1- It should be remembered at all times that Gikuyu is the original language in which the novel is written. Future translators should, as much as possible, be encouraged to work from the original.
- 2- Ngugi wishes to make the point that the £5.400 mentioned in the contract for the AWS edition were set against all his royalties and that he understands that the total amount has already been recovered [...] he would like you to make this point to the Accounts department so that they do not start deducting his royalties all over again.
- 3- He is looking forward to receiving the contract for the Memoirs. He is using the provisional title *A Colonial Affair*, although he realizes that this is supposed to be the titles of the cultural travelogue which you and I discussed with him several years back.<sup>101</sup>

While he took note of the points raised in paragraphs (1) and (3), Sambrook's response to paragraph (2) was decisive: "I ought to say straightaway that so far the advance of £5,400 already made against sales of the AWS edition of *Devil on the Cross* has not been set against 'all Ngugi's royalties'."<sup>102</sup> He explained that the royalties which had been paid to Ngugi were on sales on other titles, and which "would not have been paid had the advance on *Devil on the Cross* AWS edition been set against these."<sup>103</sup> The AWS' edition of *Devil on the Cross*, he maintained, would have to sell as many copies as necessary to cover the

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<sup>100</sup> Amy Hoff, Memo to Sambrook, 4 December 1979. HEB 27/8, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>101</sup> Chakava, Nairobi, to Sambrook, London, 4 January 1980, HEB 27/8, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>102</sup> Sambrook, London, to Chakava, Nairobi, 17 January 1980, HEB 27/8, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

advance before any royalty could be paid on such an edition. As he went over the contract with Amy Hoff, Sambrook was able to confirm that although the contract stated that the advance of “£5.400 is recoverable from royalties due to Ngugi on the sales of all his titles,” he was able to prove through the accounts that no deduction had been made.<sup>104</sup> The plan, however, was to have the contract amended and the existing situation covered contractually. This was done by a mutual agreement between all the parties whereby an attached letter to the contract “stating that the advance against *Devil On The Cross* is set against that title and not all his royalties.”<sup>105</sup>

The issue, however, continued to surface in the communication between Chakava and Sambrook during the following months. For HEB London, the issue was the way not a subject of how to recover the large advance, but how to avoid any possible difficulties if Ngugi was to for advances on future titles. Sambrook explained this as follows:

If an alternative is proposed, I would like to know how Ngugi would react to a possible compromise – for example, the deduction of £1,000 from royalties due half-yearly from the sale of all titles. In this way the advance would paid off in instalments over a period of three years. I am raising this because I foresee difficulties ahead if Ngugi asks us to pay advances on future titles (e.g. *The Prison Diary*) in reserving such advances against sales of a book which may not be published for a year or 18 months from signature of the contract and payment of the advance.<sup>106</sup>

Sambrook’s proposition was, however, opposed by Ngugi who possibly felt he was held responsible alone for the uneasy royalties’ situation. He argued that although the *Devil on the Cross* had been contracted eighteen months earlier, “the delay in delivering the manuscript [sic] was the result of ‘unnatural interruption’” and that the advance paid was “an exception rather than a rule.”<sup>107</sup> It was an awkward situation for Ngugi and his editors.

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<sup>104</sup> Sambrook, London, to Chakava, Nairobi, 18 April 1980, HEB 27/8, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>105</sup> A.B. Beal, London, to Ngugi, Nairobi, 1 August, 1980 HEB 27/8. See also Chakava’s letter to Currey, 11 July, 1980 HEB 27/8, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>106</sup> Sambrook, London, to Chakava, Nairobi, 18 April 1980, HEB 27/8, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>107</sup> Chakava, Nairobi, to Sambrook, London, 16 May, 1980, HEB 27/8, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.



As a full time writer, Ngugi had been living on his royalties since his release from detention. This explains why he was actively writing more than a book at the time. Besides translating *Caिताani Mutharaba-Ini* and *Ngaahika Ndeenda* from Gikuyu to English Ngugi was involved in writing and editing a collection of essays, *Writers in Politics* and *Detained*, a memoir of his detention. While Ngugi's involvement in these projects was meant to secure an income, they also brought forth the subject of new advances which HEB London seemed reluctant to discuss at the time.

Still his editors at HEB London were keen on finding other sources of income to help. Although he seemed annoyed at an earlier stage by Ngugi's insistence on retaining US rights and simultaneously asking HEB London to find - and negotiate with - American publishers on his behalf,<sup>108</sup> Currey contacted friends at Dutton Publishers in New York to see if they were willing to take up the first the option on *Devil on the Cross* since they had published the US edition of *Petals of Blood*. "Should they not wish to take up the option," wrote Currey, "then obviously he would be of interest to you in your new role as creator of a 'Barth' list at Putnams."<sup>109</sup> Sambrook, in turn, wrote to John Watson, the Managing Director of HEB Inc in the United States to enquire about the scope of an advance an America publisher could offer. "The point we would have to bear in mind in bidding for the US rights on *Devil on the Cross*," explained Sambrook "is that Ngugi is looking for a substantial advance. I would think he has in mind something like US \$4000 upwards."<sup>110</sup> John Watson, however, felt the amount was beyond the means of his infant company. As an alternative, he proposed that Ngugi ask "whichever trade publisher signs the book to agree to let us release our edition after two years" because, he adds, "it would be good to have a

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<sup>108</sup> In a letter to Lawrence Hill with regard to *Devil on the Cross*, Currey wrote: "Well, I suppose Ngugi may come to his senses. I wish he could get himself an agent in the States who could get him Updike and New Yorker. He is already six months late in delivering this one and I am already regretting putting it in the list." See Currey, to Lawrence Hill, 23 December 1977. HEB 27/8, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>109</sup> Currey, to Faith Sale, 14 November 1979, HEB 27/8, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>110</sup> Sambrook, London, to John Watson, New York, 10 March 1980, HEB 27/8, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

clause written into any agreement, authorizing us to import the AWS edition as soon as the US edition goes o/p [out of print].”<sup>111</sup>

Simultaneously, Currey, dedicated his efforts to selling translations rights. “As I mentioned to Ngugi now that he is a full-time professional writer,” explained Currey, “the best way of increasing his income is to sell translation rights.”<sup>112</sup> Once Currey made extensive contact with various publishers in Europe and Asia, the subject as to who control translation rights surfaced again. Chakava wrote to Amy Hoff objecting to her indication that HEB London held world rights on *Devil on the Cross* and *I Will Marry When I Want*, adding that the AWS editions of the two works were mere translations. “Before we are able to sort out the other rights,” added Chakava, “I am definite that, on both titles, the market rights for Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania definitely belong to HEB Nairobi through joint publication arrangement already in force on a number of titles.”<sup>113</sup> There is nothing in the AWS’ archive to indicate how the issue was resolved. Currey continued contacting – and negotiating with – numerous publishers trying to sell the translations right of Ngugi’s books. Perhaps he seemed content to take a responsibility which Chakava was not in the position to take. Lacking the expertise and wide professional network which Currey had built over the years, Chakava appeared yielding in the end on this particular subject. Perhaps also the idea of a joint publication meant that the royalties would be divided between Ngugi and his two ‘original’ publishers.

On his part, Ngugi who remained silent was voicing his demands via Chakava. The recurrent subject of the messages he conveyed to Currey and his colleagues in London was his strong emphasis that any translation of the two works should be from the original texts. When Currey was able to sell Japanese and Swedish translation rights, Chakava delivered an already clear point: “Ngugi wants me to tell you that he hopes you have informed these

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<sup>111</sup> John Watson, New York, to Sambrook, London, 21 March, 1980, HEB 14/7, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>112</sup> Currey, London, to Chakava, Nairobi, 11 July 1980, HEB 30/2, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

<sup>113</sup> Chakava, Nairobi, Amy Hoff, London, 16 December 1981, HEB 127/8, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.



publishers that the book must be translated from the language in which it was originally written- Gikuyu. If the publishers cannot meet this condition, he cannot allow them to translate from the English version.”<sup>114</sup>

The point made, Currey went to convey the wish of the author to all interested publishers in publishing the two works. This, however, became a problem as many of potential publishers expressed their reservations and opted not to buy the rights although many of whom were interested in his jail diary, *Detained*, as it was originally written in English. In fact, a large part of the publishing files of these two works contains correspondences between HEB London and foreign publishers about translations rights. There is very little about how the books themselves were published. A salient feature of these files is that numerous of documents are related to Ngugi’s royalties. Whether such documents are regular royalty statements, enquiries for updates on royalty statements or letters explaining the sales of Ngugi’s books, they all seem to indicate a transformation of the author-publisher relationship into a sheer business connection. Ngugi himself does not appear to have written more than a few letters to the staff of HEB. Most of his messages were made through Chakava. The relationship which had been once built on mutual friendship between Ngugi and the HEB’s editors in London was slowly becoming formal and based on economic factors as it would obviously remain so.

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<sup>114</sup> Chakava, Nairobi, Currey, 25 November 1981, HEB 27/8, SC, Uni., of R, Reading.

## *Conclusion*

It has been the aim of this dissertation to shed light on the history of the AWS and the remarkable success it has attained in promoting African literary production on an international scale at a time when African creative writing had little exposure beyond national borders. Drawing on the Series' archives preserved in the library of the University of Reading which I have been able to access, particularly those sections which are closely related to the works of Achebe and Ngugi, this dissertation provides a documented account of a significant part of the Series' history. Although the records of AWS abound in rich and captivating detail concerning the day-to-day administrative and editorial matters, it is the correspondence between AWS principal editors such as Milne, Sambrook, Currey, Higo and Chakava and celebrated African authors like Achebe and Ngugi that has dominated the main focus of this study. Both in terms of commercial success and literary fame, these writers had a clear advantage over many other African writers whose names also featured in the AWS. While critical studies of Achebe's and Ngugi's literary works have emphasized thematic, stylistic, or epistemological questions, very little attention has been paid to the powerful affiliations between intellectual and creative production on the one hand and the culture of publishing institutions on the other. For Achebe and Ngugi, becoming literary personalities involved a gradual process of discovery and exposure that eventually led to a radical transformation in their intellectual orientations. It is through their largely overlooked correspondence that these slow and profound changes can be identified and studied.

In the five chapters which make up the body of this thesis, my concern has been to show how the institutional association between HEB and African literature was shaped by the continuing effects of the colonial period. In particular, the increasing dominance of the English language and the persistence of the British educational system even after the



official end of the colonial era combined with the absence of adequate publishing infrastructures and resources were crucial factors in attracting British Publishers to invest their capital and expertise. The coming into being of HEB was largely enabled by these colonial legacies which encouraged British publishing industry to build a strong link with Anglophone Africa in the post-colonial era. By making its publishing agendas and strategies correspond with the needs of African educational systems as well as the growing demands for African writings, HEB sought to bridge a gap in the publishing programmes of other British publishers. Publishing African literature was perceived as a viable business project that allowed the company to plant a strong foothold in the competitive African educational market and to gain financial profit from selling the AWS in large quantities to a growing readership in various parts of Africa. Moreover, African literature came to be regarded as an expression of nationalistic sentiments of the newly independent nations through which African writers endeavoured to assert their culture, history and traditions. While I have argued this was used as a marketing tool by HEB in order to appease the nationalist tendencies of African officials, readers and writers, it simultaneously provided them with invaluable services in addition to publishing a large number of manuscripts. Thus, the setting up of branches – and subsequently autonomous companies – in West and East Africa had a productive impact in terms of the circulation of African books and the development of African publishing infrastructure.

On the other hand, aware of the poor state of the local publishing industry and keen to achieve local and international recognition, African authors directed their attention to HEB which seemed well equipped to market their works both abroad and inside Africa where they assumed their immediate readership was located. Although many African writers would later opt for local publishers, their long and complex partnership with metropolitan houses sustained by historical legacies remained strong. The examples of Achebe and Ngugi's relationships with HEB are proof of the ways in which this transnational

connection produced a reciprocal and beneficial impact on both. Achebe and Ngugi were the “first” important writers to emerge from West and East Africa respectively and become associated with Heinemann. Over the years of their professional relationship with Heinemann, both authors seem gradually to have developed a complex literary awareness and political visions which expressed through their works. It must be added that their changing intellectual and political ideas were influencing decidedly their close and continuing association with Heinemann as the annals of their correspondence clearly indicate.

Ngugi’s early intellectual position vis-à-vis HEB was defined by his ideological uncertainties. At the outset Ngugi appears to have been somewhat eager and conciliatory in his dealings with HEB because he was still in the process of forming strong intellectual convictions. In contrast, Achebe’s beginning as a writer was characterised by a relative sense of confidence. From the mid-sixties onwards, however, both writers experienced a crisis which compelled them not only to express their disenchantment with the existing political systems, but also to subject their previous positions to thorough revision.

Ngugi’s transformation into a radical writer began during his postgraduate studies at Leeds and is evident in the themes and the style of his novel *A Grain of Wheat*. By the time he moved back to Kenya, his growing dissatisfaction with the political *status quo* took the form of objections expressed through both words and actions as it progressed towards direct opposition to the Kenyan political establishment. Ten years later, he paid for his radical position with his freedom. His detention was a clear sign that his writings and political views were dangerous and no longer deemed tolerable. In addition to his dissident public opinions, the subject matter of his novels and plays during this period dramatised and popularized the criticism he was directing against the Kenyan government. His victim status added further resonance to his writing and brought him wide support across the world.



His relationship with HEB appears to have also been affected by these developments. He had renounced his religious beliefs and rejected his English name. Hoping to be consistent in his ideological convictions, Ngugi eventually decided to write in Gikuyu, thus revealing a radical degree of awareness of the role of the writer and the political message he had to put across. The dilemmas of his twenties were now resolved as he looked forward to his fortieth birthday. Writing in Gikuyu meant that his future manuscripts were placed with HEB East Africa, a company that was also in the process of being Africanised. Not only was its Managing Director, Chakava, a Kenyan national, but also its list had an impressive number of translations from English into local languages in addition to other several series in Kiswahili which were either in preparation or were in the process of publishing. The East African branch seemed to welcome Ngugi's own transformation. It is important to note that Ngugi had a strong influence on his former student, Chakava, as he was continually reminding him to 'localise' his publishing programme. By 1986, when Ngugi was bidding farewell to English, HEB (EA) was also being indigenised as 60 % of the equity was sold to Kenyan nationals, two of whom were Chakava and Ngugi.

These developments did not officially end Ngugi's relationship with HEB in London. The firm continued to publish AWS edition of his new books and sell them in other regions outside East Africa. In fact, their relationship became increasingly focused on economic factors. Following his release from detention and refusal of the Ministry of Education to reinstate him in his position at lecturer at the University of Nairobi, Ngugi became dependent on the advances HEB was able to offer. The royalties he was deriving from the sales of his previous books also kept the connection alive. This very connection, however, was a source of much criticism. Ali Mazrui, for instance, reflecting on the subject, appropriately asked: "if Ngugi hates neo-colonialism and capitalism that much why does

he publish with Heinemann, one of the biggest capitalist and imperialist in the world?”<sup>1</sup>

Ngugi’s answer was rather simpler: “I have never said that I am above the contradictions which bedevil our society. I have never said that I have found solutions to those contradictions which are basically social and political in character.”<sup>2</sup>

Although Achebe did not share Ngugi’s ideological orientations, his position vis-à-vis Heinemann developed along lines that are not entirely dissimilar. Achebe’s direct political engagement in the Nigerian civil war seems to have put him not only in a direct clash with the state, but also caused him to reconsider his notions of identity, nation and the role of the African writer. HEB’s reluctance to publish new books by Igbo writers during the war period,<sup>3</sup> on the other hand, must have had its negative impact on a writer who was waging a war mostly on ethnic grounds. On moving to the early seventies, Achebe’s decision to give up his notable role as the advisor of the AWS perhaps came to reflect his intentions to slightly distance himself from his British publishers. His genuine call for supporting the local publishing industry was corroborated as he placed some of his manuscripts with Nigerian Publishers. Ten out of sixteen works he wrote or edited between 1971 and 1990 were published originally in Africa. Nevertheless, the link between Achebe and HEB was never completely severed. He remained their best-selling African author, and they remained his favourite British publishers.

As I am completing the writing of this dissertation, various events celebrating the golden anniversary of the publication of Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* have been taking place in

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<sup>1</sup> Sicherman, *Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, The Making of a Rebel: A Sourcebook in Kenyan Literature and Resistance* (London: H. Zell Publishers, 1990), p.37.

<sup>2</sup> Reinhard W Sander and Bernth Lindfors, *Ngugi wa Thiong’o Speaks: Interviews with the Kenyan Writer* (Oxford: James Currey Publishers, 2006), p. 131.

<sup>3</sup> Sambrook, London, to Munonye, Enugu, 3 May 1968, HEB 3/9, SC, Uni., of R, Reading. Sambrook explained the policy of HEB at the period as follows: “Events have certainly affected our publishing plans for Biafran writers. We have decided it is best to wait until events break one way or other and publish when there is a chance of Biafran writers reaching the Biafran market. We are, of course, selling copies of your book, Chinua’s books, Cyprian Ekwensi’s and so on outside Biafra but, rightly or wrongly we think that new books by Biafran writers will be better published when things clear up a bit.”



Africa and elsewhere. The most notable of these occasions perhaps is the forthcoming conference which will take place at the University of London in October 2008. Beside the many key speakers who will attempt to assess the enduring impact of the novel on various generations of readers and scholars, the presence of Achebe in the conference will be an occasion for his reunion with former publishers and editors. Heinemann, which in June 2008 issued a new edition of *Things Fall Apart* to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the novel's publication, is also one of the sponsors of this particular cultural event.

The long enduring relationship between HEB and Achebe and Ngugi, therefore, still continues to influence current academic research and curricular activities. This dissertation has provided a historical account of some significant moments in the literary careers of these celebrated authors. Implicitly, the underlying intention has been to emphasize the relevance of studying the complex web of economic, political, and literary conditions that in the end governed the publication of African literature, and helped to establish its reputation worldwide.

Today Heinemann's AWS has ceded its dominant role in publishing African Literature. In Kenya, the United States, Sweden, India, South Africa, and Australia, to cite a few examples, publishers have produced and distributed African works and caused African authors to become better known to new generations of readers. In Britain, publishers like OUP, Macmillan, and Longman have, over the years, recruited African authors and engaged in publishing a large number of books for and about Africa. Their archives along with the AWS' archives still lie unexplored in various institutions, and in turn deserve a thorough investigation far more comprehensive than the limited account this thesis has offered.

# **Appendix 1**

## **Interview with James Currey**

*Nourdin Bejjit*

**8/23/2005**

**The meeting took place at James Currey Publishers, Oxford.**



## *Interview*

**Nourdin Bejjit:** You worked for Oxford University Press before going to Heinemann Educational Books. What made you decide to move to the African Writers Series?

**James Currey:** Oxford University Press was an excellent apprenticeship particularly in Cape Town. Rex Collins did start the Three Crown Series and this was particularly good at bringing on playwrights like Soyinka and J. P. Clark, and so on. But the OUP, apart from anything else, there was a decision not to publish novels by contemporary writers and, so, that although they allowed short stories to be published they did not publish novels. I think, you see, the African Writers Series started in 1962, the Three Crown Series was started, I think 1961 or 1962.

Then OUP - I spent three years with them publishing a wide range of serious books on Africa, academic books, some textbooks and the Three Crowns. Anyhow, I was not particularly looking around but Rex Collins in particular said: "Look that job that's going on Heinemann, have you put in for it?" So, I thought well there is no harm in having an interview and, then, as soon as I realised how interesting the job was going to be, I was very keen to get it. And of course, going back to the question of novels, obviously, the central strength of the AWS from the first was novels both written and translated into English. So, it just seemed to me a very exciting opportunity.

**NB:** Why did you leave after 17 years?

**JC:** The AWS was started in 1962. Chinua Achebe was the editorial advisor. Keith was building up the whole of overseas, the Third World Department and decided that I should help him specifically on Africa where there was the biggest potential for publishing. And so, I joined him after the series had been running for about 5 years. By 1972, we got to a 100 titles in the first ten years, but by then more and more writing was coming in and it was rather an exciting period in the 1970s and there was a lot of work to publish, because in 1972, when Chinua Achebe decided to stand down as editorial advisor, he first of all thought of Ngugi or he and I thought of Ngugi. In fact, I went to visit him just after the Biafran war at the remains of his house on the campus at Nsukka in the University of Nigeria, in Eastern Nigeria, (what was formerly Biafra) and he said to me then: "why don't you try Ngugi?" So I and my colleagues decided that was what we would do.

Ngugi accepted without hesitation, but after six weeks or a couple of months, he thought it would interrupt his work on his own writing. So, we decided at that time to bring in much more active participation from the new companies and then, new editorial departments in Ibadan and Nairobi. In Nairobi, a young student or former student of Ngugi, Henry Chakava, came in about 1972/1973. Aig Higo had been head of the Heinemann Nigeria Company for some eight or ten years. So, he was, a sort of, a generation older than Henry Chakava. Then we set about integrating decisions between — we had a sort of triangular basis that we all exchanged our reports. They were having all manuscripts coming into base through Nigeria and Kenya... so, as a result of this we were publishing yet more and by the end of the 1970s, there was a Nigerian oil boom and container loads of books going out to Nigeria. There was the Kenyan coffee boom — black gold as it was called — and there was a very lively publishing scene about that time and Heinemann was active... I think Longman and Macmillan as well... so there was a lot going on in Nairobi.

And then in April 1982, it was an absolute crash because the Nigerian foreign exchange closed. And a lot of countries in Africa were inundated. That killed the whole forward impetus. We moved into the 1980s ... it was actually christened the book famine because people did not



have the foreign exchange to buy books for Africa... having in the 1970s being buying and buying and buying... and so during the 1980s, Heinemann had four owners in three years, and the new managing directors were always told "cut jobs, increase profit", and having been an extremely enjoyable firm to work for, in 1984, I think, eight out of the ten directors either went on or moved on to other jobs elsewhere

I demanded my redundancy because the new managing director said that he just wanted to keep a finger, a toe in Africa... "Oh James, you know so much about it." So I said: "what can I publish?" And he said "well a couple of African writers Series and complete the UNESCO history of Africa". So, having been publishing something like forty books a year, he was talking about three or four books a year. So, I said "so, you don't need me" ...

So with some difficulty I got some redundancy that enabled me to ... two important factors ...in setting my own company... the other important factor was this new managing director had decided to cut out all academic publishing. So, he sold the sociology list one weekend, and he didn't quite know what to do with the African studies list. So, fortunately, I was able to negotiate with him to take over all the contracts because if I hadn't taken over he would have to make compensation. So, he thought it was of advantage to me. So, I took over people like Ngugi, Terrence Ranger, and so on, where I was already in negotiation. So I literally could remove my filing cabinet.

**NB: You took these manuscripts with you?**

**JC:** A lot of manuscripts and some books on proof... They were actually already typeset, lots of projects... When I went to a big investment bank in London to discuss whether they would lend me some money, and the chap there said (the deputy chairman, who was the person I knew said): "are you starting this new company in order to make a fortune or in order to further your career?" So, I sort of blushed because I felt I was being rather guilty just to say "furthering my career". You know, keeping that going because that was what I was interested in and then he said: "that's perfectly alright, you might make a fortune anyhow." (Laugh) But, so, um, my wife and I, my wife hadn't had publishing experience before and we decided to plunge off and start up our own business.

**NB: And then Keith Sambrook joined you?**

**JC:** Keith was still with Heinemann and then in about 1987 or 1988, he left Heinemann and joined us. In fact, he had been a sort of honorary member when I used to go and visit him in his office in the Heinemann probably once a week to go through projects with him. So....

**NB: You played a very important role in the 'upbringing' of African Writers Series for nearly two decades. Some commentators consider you the Godfather of the Series. Looking back, how would you sum up this experience? In other words, what does AWS mean to you?**

**JC:** Who were you quoting? Ngara? ... I just wanted to say you've got it straight. Emmanuel Ngara at the Zimbabwe Book Fair, in about 1982, I think it was... he was chairing a very distinguished gathering of African writers and he said... he described James Currey "here is the grandfather of African literature" and in the coffee break, Nadine Gordimer said: "Oh, hello grand grandfather!" So, I said, "Oh Gosh!" I was only in my mid-forties, so I thought, "I am not quite that old, Jesus." Anyhow, the next Monday, I'd given an interview and the Zimbabwe Herald had over its centre page a headline which was 'A Godfather of African Publishing'. So, you can take your choice as to whether I am a grandfather or the godfather. (Laughs)



**NB:** Of course, you had such a strong impact on its upbringing from the tender age of five to adulthood.

**JC:** Yes, I think that I was able to come in at the time when Heinemann had realised that it really did have potential. Alan, the chairman, if he hadn't been an adventurous publisher, he might have said "Oh, Well, we are doing well enough with that"... and this is what the accountants wanted us to do... they said that the first thirty titles were much more profitable than the books we did later. But the fact was that... I think... my seventeen years with Heinemann were the period when there was a great flowering because, as you will realise, very few African authors had been published in London and they said that the great thing about AWS was that it gave Africans, African writers the idea that they could write. They've seen those pictures on the back and so on, and reading the blurb, the biography about the people... these are quite young people, these people are writing... you know... it is not just Shakespeare ... it isn't just Dickens... these are people that are writing about the Africa that we know now. And so, this was very infectious, I think, and gave people impetus, as you probably can tell me... but one of the people that Ngugi was much impressed by was George Lamming and he says in *Homecoming* how there was the moment when he suddenly realised how the novel can speak to him and, I think, this happened to a lot of people that they thought: "My goodness, these Nigerians... I can do it as well" these young Kenyans, Ngugi and so on, they got the idea ...

And so, I was in the fortunate position because I was not just doing the AWS, I was publishing an enormous range of primary, secondary and university textbooks as well, academic studies, only a handful of African studies, but the AWS was part of that... but certainly the great thing was that the success of the Series gave us enough confidence, when I say us, I and my colleagues, to be experimental that we knew that because, like all good book publishing, it does have to be based on good marketing, I mean intelligent marketing and because Heinemann was, particularly under Keith Sambrook's direction, linking up with these offices in Africa... they built up very good marketing network. Also, of course, the universities were expanding and literature departments were starting and, of course, there were new examination boards – West Africa Examination Council and East Africa Examination Council – were setting exams and they were using African texts. They were not just using Shakespeare and Dickens. To go back to my role, my role was to take advantage of all these opportunities and so, that was what was fun about it.

**NB:** Van Milne, the overseas director at HEB, decided to start the AWS to make African writers available in cheap paperback in Africa. Could you shed some light on his position and his role?

**JC:** Well, it would be quite a good idea if you talk to Keith Sambrook sometime. He knew Van personally. I only met Van occasionally and that was before I came and you get a much more accurate picture from Keith. I think, like a lot of good ideas in publishing... the ideas are good, but how do you turn them to reality... I mean, I think Van and Alan Hill were also inspired in choosing Chinua Achebe as editorial advisor because that was a key African voice and he was in broadcasting in Nigeria... So, the idea came together at that stage, I think, partly because Alan was so amazed when he went to Nigeria in 1959 and he thought that he would be praised for having published Chinua Achebe when nobody knew him... "Oh, young Achebe doing the broadcasting... has he already had a novel published in London?" these were British people saying this, you know, they did not believe an African could live up to the standard of a supposedly eminent publishing house...

**NB:** As someone who is publishing books on Africa, how do you regard the reluctance of British Publishing houses to engage with African writing before Heinemann took the initiative?



JC: I think it is instructive to look at the comparison with what happened to writers from the Caribbean... um...as always, it is a matter of who you do encourage and in the case of the Caribbean writers, the two crucial factors in bringing on Caribbean writers were literary magazines in the Caribbean and the BBC, then colonial service ...I think it was called Caribbean Voices and that encouraged quite a lot of Caribbean writers to write and they submitted their books to London publishing houses... of course, the situation in France was well ahead as the whole sort of move towards Negritude started in the late 1930s, involving both Caribbean and African, particularly Senegalese Diop and Senghor and so on ... Several of the best African Francophone African writers were publishing in Paris in the 1950s such as Oyono, Beti, and Sembene Ousmane... but very few books, as you know, were picked up... one that got a lot of attention, of course, was Amos Tutuola's *Palm-Wine Drinkard*... because Dylan Thomas, in his individual maverick way, just took delight in it... but that, in a way, was the hampering fact because I think that was, sort of, felt to be the genuine African article... and so, although there were one or two other books published... I mean Peter Abrahams had several published...

Talking about the way that the Caribbeans brought on by British publishers... Naipaul, Lamming... a lot of them had their first books out in the Fifties and then to William Heinemann's credit, they published *Things Fall Apart* in hardback in 1958... and ... as you probably know, Achebe was made to study *Mr Johnson* by Joyce Cary and thought: "if anybody could get away with writing such a bad book about Nigeria, I can do better"...um... so that was sort of his feeling.

Anyhow, I think that everything was happening fast in the Sixties, a period of independence and everything ... and very quickly, Heinemann Educational Books, which Keith and I were working for Alan Hill, the chairman, took such a dominating lead that other publishers just really decided they did not quite know what to do anyhow... and of course one of the things we were willing to do was to really discuss books with authors, give them to readers to report on, send the reports to them ...um... we did persuade William Heinemann to market some of the books in hardback first and then Heinemann Educational Books published them in paperback in the AWS. So, we spent quite a lot of effort trying to encourage Secker & Warburg, also in the Heinemann Group (and they had quite a reputation for high level of intellectual work) but on the whole they did not want to take books from us. They sold us occasional titles ... um...Yambo Ouologuem's *Bound to Violence*, Soyinka's anthology of verse, Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya* and so on... but they didn't want to give a hardback publication to our authors.

So, we, at Heinemann Educational Books, also started selecting some of the authors for hardback publications because, of course, as Denis Brutus, said to me... I mean several people said this, but I was reading this the other day, he said: "look, it's all very well, you know, but I want to be regarded as a poet and not just as an African." And of course this was the advantage and the disadvantage of the African Writers Series that it had a clear continental identity which drew attention to the books in Africa, but there was a danger of it excluding writers from the general literary market, particularly New York and London where, quite frankly, most enthusiastic reactions of a lot of people was at the best patronising towards Africans... they didn't really feel that Africans could write...well, there are exceptions... but that was their general feeling whereas, of course, particularly the public libraries were to be enormous patrons of new writings in those days... they used to spend a lot of money on...judging by reviews, but they really supported new writers. So, the Caribbean writers got a lot of that advantage. Our writers got some advantage when we did them in the hardback as well. They would get reviewed and they would get into libraries. But ... um... it goes back to the fact that the AWS, more or less, in the first twenty years was selling about eighty per cent of its copies in Africa and about ten per cent in Britain and ten per cent in the US... so, it was not only African writers, but it was mainly African distribution...



**NB:** Publishing, it seems, served the 'realistic' objectives of the Empire by providing the reading materials, educational textbooks, carrying out the *mission civilisatrice*, and domesticating the colonised. However, the case of a number of established British publishing houses such as Oxford University Press, Longman or Macmillan reveals the paradoxical relations inherent in the cultural conditions between the British companies and 'Africa' both in the colonial and postcolonial times. The question I want to ask is what was the rationale behind the persistence of such companies which succeeded in triumphing in such environments previously seen as opposing to the colonial system?

**JC:** Well, obviously you've put your finger on an important point here, because all those companies you mentioned were and other ones like Nelson... they were big on textbooks, on school textbooks and the assumption was a school textbook market and there was not a general market...um...that you could, as you say, the British equivalent of *mission civilisatrice* was, when I joined the Oxford University Press it had enormously successful Oxford English courses, it had tropical Africa and world history....

Of course, it was better to have textbooks which were written for Africa than just sending British textbooks which used to happen. But what Alan Hill, Van Milne and Keith Sambrook had began to prove, by the time I joined, was that there was a general market in Africa as well as a school textbook market that, although this was an educational company and, therefore, the big sales were then and continued to be school textbook examination adoptions.

Nevertheless, the thing that was absolutely marvellous about the African Writers Series during the Seventies was that by that stage there were university campus bookshops – not only university campus bookshops but other kind of bookshops – and that they were selling Penguin's, African Writers Series, gardening books for an adult audience because, as you know, a lot of the people involved in educational systems were adults, obviously – I mean, there were the teachers, there were the inspectors, there were the exam setters and there were the families, the wives... and the university campus bookshops became very good general bookshops and you can find all sorts of interesting books there.

Really – with probably the exception of Blackwells at that time – there were probably better bookshops on African campuses in the late sixties and seventies than there were on the British campuses, and so a general market grew for the African Writers Series... although as an educational company, it would be assumed that it was going to be first and foremost a school textbook market. And that is what of course, in actual monetary terms, it turned out to be; but the same time, then it introduced writers – obviously there were all sorts of restrictions if you just published for school: sex, religion, and politics were all considered problems. But Chinua Achebe was having nothing of that and when I came, when I joined him, we actually were absolutely determined that it should be first and foremost an adult series and some of the texts that we used in schools and they could be used in all sort of ways: Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones are not yet Born* has very powerful sustained image of 'shit' and it was very difficult for me to get that accepted because you are never going to sell a book like that in schools. But it got prescribed for 'A' Level because it was exceptionally an outstanding book and this image was central to his whole attitude towards the corrupt African regime.

**NB:** Talking about A Level, how do you think the empire's 'products' – we are talking here about the educational system, the English language as a medium of instruction, and so on – providing fruitful grounds for the industry of publishing to flourish in Africa, particularly after the fall of the British colonial rule?

**JC:** Yes, the English language, of course, was the language of authority, but it was also the language of resistance. So, that's a vehicle... it's there for you to get your message across even if it is one of authority or even if it is one of objecting to authority.



**NB:** But for a publisher like Heinemann Educational Books, the existence of a relatively large readership in English across the African continent, as Alan Hill notes in his autobiography, was providing more opportunities than in North Africa for example...

**JC:** Yes, what was very important to the Kenyan company under Henry Chakava was beginning to publish books in Kiswahili. But it was quite difficult because, unless they were prescribed in the school system, the sales were negligible and so, you know, you can't afford go on publishing books which aren't selling. That was quite difficult. We published little that was not in English. We tried to do a few books in Yoruba. We did few books in Kiswahili, and in South Africa we specifically did not publish because there the African languages were only prescribed by the Bantu Education Department which was a sell out.

**NB:** How do you think British publishers accommodated new post-colonial discourses and agendas?

**JC:** The problem is publishers respond on a very ad-hoc basis to the market opportunities in a particular situation. And so, one of the things that did happen was the generation of whole new area of study which at one stage was called Commonwealth literature and then postcolonial studies. But this did mean that the growth of African literature has been a serious area of study.

**NB:** Launching overseas branches in Nigeria and Kenya in 1960s as well as in other commonwealth countries was to reflect the economic and political policies at home towards Africa in the period following the Suez Crisis. There were other motifs behind this urgent search for profitable markets in Africa, though. Alan Hill noticed that other British publishers "were taking profits out of West Africa, and putting nothing back in the way of investment in local publishing and encouragement of local authors"(123). For Alan Hill 'profit, though important, was not [his] primary concern'. His idealistic vision was almost prophetic particularly after the success of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, which prompted Hill's team to develop African Writers Series, publishing literary works by African authors hitherto unknown in Africa and the world at large. What was the philosophy behind the making of Heinemann AWS?

**JC:** Well, (laugh) it happened I was looking at Alan Hill's autobiography last night and, of course, Alan Hill is saying that he is the only pure one. All of us have mixed motives and some of the motives of which we were not so sure turned out to be actually quite valuable. Anyhow, what he says is not quite fair. For instance, Oxford University Press had a Nigerian chief T. T. Solaru as head of the Nigerian company in the late Fifties, I think.... They did not have Kenyan in Nairobi, but certainly as in West Africa, there was always a tension between the branch and the centre. I know that Charles Lewis, head of OUP in Nairobi, fought with his bosses in London and in Oxford because he wanted to keep the money that they made out of publishing an English course... he wanted to put back into publishing plays in Swahili, and into Zuka, a literary magazine. He actually wanted to put it back, but he was turned off. These tensions were running. Alan Hill's central philosophy was very positive – his father had been in the teachers' trade union – and so he came from a concerned leftish stand point. Sometimes, Keith hesitates using the word 'left' about Alan... but anyhow, that was his central philosophy.

We were owned by Tillings – the big bus company nationalised by Labour in 1947. They said: "Last year you achieved 13.5 per cent return on funds. As long as you achieve a little more than that, as long as you don't slip back, we are happy." What Alan said to me was: "We have to do that, we've got to be efficient, we've got to make that sort of return on funds... but the important thing is the more you can make, the bigger margin you can make, the greater freedom that gives you to experiment ... that money is working capital for us to invest in new



projects.” So that was very positive practical philosophy... it was working within the capitalist system. This was very important. For instance, when I was told that Bessie Head was having difficulties in getting *Question of Power* accepted, I was able to persuade my directors from my reaction, from Keith’s reaction, from the reports that this was an outstanding novel and we ought to accept it. The argument was even if we can’t sell it to schools, within the context of the general market for the African Writers Series, the book will sell perfectly, comfortably and profitably. Alan said: “As long as you give them their profit, they are not going to question you much, but if you don’t give them that profit, they’ll start cutting back and be cautious.” So it was a very basic philosophy.

In the eighties, Heinemann, in five years was owned by four companies; and the first company was BTR who, a dawn raid on the stock exchange, took over Tillings who owned Heinemann. They immediately demanded that return on the funds went up from 13%, 14% to 23%... and they actually confiscated our cheque book because they made a lot of money over being very tight on the management of money. There were lots of different companies... and some of them were doing rather badly and Heinemann was doing very well. The Heinemann group of publishers was in the early Eighties was only about, I think, eight per cent of the money invested in the whole of the Tilling Group, but it was about twelve per cent of the profit. But we were being profitable by being enterprising. A book like Sembene Ousmane’s *God’s Bits of Wood*... again the argument was that because that was a big fat book it was going to cost more than ten shillings – which was the old fifty pence – and, therefore, schools wouldn’t buy it. But it sold over 50,000 in the next few years. Within Heinemann there were tensions about what we, as an educational company, could do. In Africa we were not just regarded as an educational company; we were a general company as well. In Britain, we sold the AWS through the William Heinemann’s reps who went to the bookshops and promoted the books as general books...

**NB:** Just in relation to what you’ve just said concerning publishing writers from different parts of Africa and about HEB’s philosophy, both Van Milne and Alan Hill’s intention was to publish “black” African writings... as a North African myself, it seems to me that there was a kind of marginalisation of some interesting ‘African’ writings...

**JC:** The use of “black”, over the years, has shifted. Hasn’t it? The rough and ready philosophy about the African Writers Series was that the writers should be born in Africa or spent their formative years there. Doris Lessing wasn’t born there, but she wrote about something which was of concern within two black African countries. South Africa was in a funny situation because it was cut off from the rest of the continent in political terms, but, of course, it was the most advanced in terms of the publishing industry. We never had a racial line, because how the hell do you know about Angolans and Mozambiquans. I was saying only the other day that when I was in South Africa in the early Sixties, there was a feeling that somehow people of mixed colour were not actually quite properly African. There is a very good new book by Christopher Heywood published by Cambridge UP about South African literature and he is absolutely fascinating about ‘creolisation’ as he calls it. He sees this as part of Atlantic creolisation as the mixture in the southern states of America, in the Caribbean, within Africa itself. Some of our most distinguished South African writers were people of mixed race... I mean... Alex La Guma’s father, I think, boasted of Japanese, Mauritian, and Scottish ancestors... (laugh)... none of them African. I think Africans in South Africa, to a certain extent, were imprisoned by apartheid. They were put apart by the whole apartheid racial ideology and they are mixed as anything...

Nuruddin Farah wrote from Chandigarh in India where he was at the university and sent the manuscript of his first novel. All the people who read it said: “Is this written by a woman?” because it is very sensitive about the whole position of women in a Muslim society. So, I asked him if he was an African and if he was a woman (laugh) and he thought this was very funny.



Anyhow, I did not know it is a Muslim and I did not know... in fact, like yours. I did check up that he was African. We had one manuscript which was sent by Black American, who said his name was Musa Nagenda which was a Ugandan name. We accepted, but not for the AWS. I asked him for a photograph and he sent a photograph of his cook (laugh)... who was a Ugandan... Nadine Gordimer ... I said to her: "Look, I am interested to discuss with my colleagues in Ibadan and Nairobi which collection we should include in the AWS." After some thought, she put together *Some Monday for Sure*. Lots of enthusiastic reactions came from Henry Chakava and his team in Nairobi. Silence from Nigeria, which was unusual but Nadine was saying "Oh, it doesn't matter... it was worth a try to see what people feel." Then a belated, very enthusiastic, report came in from Nigeria, which she described as perceptive. Having worked in Cape Town for five years one is, a sort of, hyper-sensitive on these racial issues.

As you will see, unfortunately, there was a very poor representation of North African writing in the AWS... we got involved in the Arab Authors where the criterion was that the book had to be written in Arabic.

**NB: And, of course, Tayeb Salih was a bestseller**

**JC:** When I was at Oxford University Press, I met Denys Johnson-Davies... he was doing an anthology of stories from Arab countries and he said that he had this friend in the BBC who had been published in the Arab world. So, he brought round his manuscript of his translation of *The Wedding of Zein*. Keith Sambrook rang me up - I had already accepted the job at Heinemann - and he said "Chinua Achebe is coming through next week, it would be a chance for you to come and say hello"... because I had never met him before ... I had met Soyinka, Clark and other OUP authors, but not Chinua... I took the manuscript of *Zein* because it had been turned down for the Three Crowns at OUP. I was just amazed because I showed this manuscript to Chinua and to Keith Sambrook and they both spent five or six minutes at it and they said: "Oh, this looks promising" and almost by the end of that meeting that they accepted it. This was completely different from OUP where everything was formal and you had to go through committees and everybody was very snooty ... and "Ooooooh, not up to our standards" and all these sort of things.

So, it was a very different atmosphere where Chinua and Keith were absolutely delighted by fresh writing like that... As soon as Heinemann accepted *Zein*, Denys said "What about *Season of Migration to the North*?" We got the English translation of *Season* out within a year of its first Arabic publication and as a result of that Denys came back and said: "Look, what about these Egyptian writers - Naguib Mahfouz, Taha Hussein, Tawfik Al Hakim, Yossef Idriss and so on?" Arabic was an African language, or an African based language, of great importance and, of course, we didn't want to miss out on that for the AWS. So, we started publishing Naguib Mahfouz, but people in the Arab World were snobbish about the African label. So we started Arab Authors. More writing came from Egypt and Sudan together than from the rest of the Arabic world. We just gave them fresh covers and marketed them differently and that was quite a successful series. I remember one Penguin rep said we were soon selling better in the Gulf than Penguin was selling their fiction in English.

**NB: Heinemann Educational Books has enabled African literature to become a concrete reality for Anglophone audiences, it has perforce shaped certain general tendencies and allowed them to emerge and dominate: what particular audience had Heinemann targeted in the publication of African writings?**

**JC:** Because we were an educational company, the major audience was through the educational network. For instance, for every new book in the African writer series, we had a list of something like a hundred people to whom we sent specimen copies of the latest title... this was a mixture of academics and writers and some key booksellers and so on. So, we



particularly had the academic market in mind ... what we discovered in places, interesting cities like Ibadan, Accra, Nairobi, Johannesburg, Salisbury (Harare as it was then) was that people were going in to buy, to look, to see what the latest AWS titles were and they were buying for their own interest. And libraries were certainly buying not only for an educational, but also for a general audience...

**NB: When targeting these audiences, what kind of ideologies or values did Heinemann support?**

**JC:** What we did not support was racialism! (Laugh) ...all your value judgements about writing are very subjective, but in all the three publishing centres – Ibadan, Nairobi and London – we had quite a good group of readers. Quite few of the advisors were actual writers themselves, particularly novelists and playwrights and so on. We were confident that this was some of the most exciting writing that was been done in English, but we also got other professionals to help writers develop their manuscripts, to work on their plots, to reconsider the balance of the book... shortened... lengthened... all these sort of things... but the people we would get to help us were not ordinary educationalists. They were professional practising writers and university teachers doing their best to judge things by international standards. Simon Gikandi, who was another of Ngugi's students in Nairobi... Henry Chakava got him to work with him before he went off to Edinburgh to do his doctorate... and Simon's reports were replete with comparisons with John Carlos Williams, with Fuentes. His international comparisons were with the most interesting writing of the time wherever it came from. So, that was very much the philosophy, and Simon Gikandi was a particularly good editor. Chinua and Ngugi also advised quite a lot at one stage...we used our published writers to give us advice as well.

**NB: Talking about Achebe and Ngugi, wasn't the liberalism with which Heinemann received their radical views, and others' of course, a strategy of domesticating the wild?**

**JC:** We tried to achieve, particularly Henry, Aig and myself, that the input from Africa was very strong in terms of advice. Not that it was always necessary good advice from Africa.... When I sent to Henry Chakava Dambudzo Marechera's *The House of Hunger*, he gave it to a local academic who complained that it put Africa in a bad light.... Henry ignored this advice. It was just that he didn't rate it. He just said: "If this is the first work by this writer, then he has a great future." Nuruddin Farah's second novel, *A Naked Needle* ... actually in that case both the British novelists who worked on it didn't much like it...they thought Nuruddin was too much influenced by James Joyce - indeed Nuruddin had done his thesis on James Joyce. Gikandi in Nairobi was very enthusiastic about it as was in fact Molara Leslie in Ibadan...and she said that with this book the African novel comes of age....

So, during that period in the late Seventies, we really did have a very very virile exchange of ideas. One of the things that one, of course, takes for granted now is communication but in those days it was quite expensive to communicate: airmail was expensive.. you tended to use cables... they were expensive... airmail letters were quite fast, but that still meant even if you replied by return you probably wouldn't get the message back in under three weeks from the original. There was a sort of rhythm about the posts... you were writing all these letters out and on the whole you could trust those services. Telephoning was extraordinary expensive ... you had to book calls and so on... Travelling by air was very expensive. A lot of Africans used to arrive in London from July to September... they used to flood into our offices to get free lunches and so on...we were able to be very hospitable...and lots of African writers used to meet at the Heinemann offices. If a couple of people were coming in at the same time ... we would book a dining room and then we have another sort of half a dozen writers or artists would turn up. And so, there was a great deal of exchange going on between the writers



themselves and we as publishers. When our own people like Henry Chakava and Aig Higo would be in London ... again we set up gatherings with whoever was in London at that time.

**NB:** Diana Athill in her memoir *Stet* says that: “for a time during the Fifties and early Sixties it was probably easier for a black writer to get his book accepted by a London publisher, and kindly reviewed thereafter, than it was for a young white person”. The question that Dr Gail Low raises is: was it the guilt-feelings over the British imperial past that prompted these publishers, literary and academic to support the ‘South’s writings’ or was it the curiosity to listen to the voices of Africans?

**JC:** Yeah ...when she says ‘black’, she is talking about mostly Caribbean and some black Americans.... It was difficult for Africans to get accepted before the African Writers Series. I admire *Stet* in the way that I am reserved about Alan Hill’s book, because, I think, it’s much more self-aware and self-critical than Alan’s... Alan, thank goodness, we had him... because, you know, he did break the rules... he was a non-conformist and that’s the great achievement... but thank goodness we had Diana Athill too... I was in a meeting the other day where Austen Clark, the Barbadian writer, and he was talking about that period particularly the importance of having something accepted and read on the radio from London ... that was a tremendous thing ... he also said that it was marvellous that he had to struggle through the same textbooks in Barbados that contemporary students were having to struggle through in Britain. Diana Athill was of course was the early publisher of Naipaul. Guilt did not enter into the terms of young people ... elders might have had guilt ...but the young people were determined to do something about it. Alan Hill quotes Chinua Achebe saying that Chinua’s teacher said that he thought the group of people that he had to teach in Nigeria were better than he had ever to teach in a British school. You had the Malaysian emergency, the Mau Mau in Kenya, and then you had the idiot Suez adventure... and so by the end of the Fifties, Macmillan and Macleod thought ‘let’s get rid of this lot... there can only be more trouble’... but in terms of people in the intellectual world, there were young people trying to do jobs one way or another. We were just enthusiastic about the end of empire ... John Reed who did the anthology ... Reed and Wake’s anthology of African verse... he was saying the other day: “We didn’t know what the hell we were doing!” He was teaching in Salisbury ... we just did want to do things ... we just kept on trying this and that... we were well educated ... we had a good rounded education ourselves ... and we didn’t see why African shouldn’t have a good rounded education. Of course, it was through the medium of English, and that meant that a lot of the cultural values were transferred, but, I think, when you look at the teachers at the universities at that time, it wasn’t a sense of guilt. They were trying to do a decent job...within the terms of their own society... you know... we are all coming from wherever we come from...

Publishers are like book makers... they have a range of bets, and they think: “Oh, this look quite promising for that sort of market and that looks promising for that.... we do a couple of those there...” and they spread the betting on books ... and when one or two succeed, then that provides the money so that they can try a new lot. When *Things Fall Apart* was published by William Heinemann, it would have been probably one of a couple dozen novels published during that year by William Heinemann, and they were pretty sure that they would get their money back from selling to libraries. What they hoped as a hardback publishing house to do was to sell subsidiary rights particularly and immediately to paperback, film, broadcasting, all those subsidiary rights. Basically their initial bet, like a book maker, was “This is reasonably decent book and got quite a good report ... we have some hopes about it.” This is what they were saying about Chinua Achebe’s book “Well, put that into the spring list or the autumn list”... so you hedged your bet. There was the Collins’ Fontana imprint and which took up some books such as Camara Laye’s *The African Child*. They took up Ike’s *Toads for Supper*. It had quite a batch of African writers within a general paperback series selling in bookshops



around Britain. So people were trying these different writers, but basically there was quite a prejudice against African writers.

**NB:** This will bring us to the question of literary “standards”. In the colonial time there was a general assumption that Africans were unable to write... when Achebe published his first novel... that was a novel that reached a level of commanding the “western” style of writing... in one of your articles about Achebe published in *African Affairs* in 2003, you say: “In Africa there were no established standards to inhibit originality. New standards would emerge out of the manuscripts they were offered.” On the other hand, and in a letter to Ngugi dated the 13<sup>th</sup> of August 1962, Van Milne wrote: “As it stands *Weep Not, Child* is not quite up to standard for the African Writers Series, but the writing is very promising and I would like to find some way of helping you to revise the manuscript still further.” Arguably there were some “standards”? Who set them? And what were they?

**JC:** I was talking ironically because when I was talking about “the standards” of the OUP... because the OUP was mistaken not taking Tayeb Salih’s book. I was absolutely certain that it was up to the standards of other titles already published in Three Crowns. Quite honestly I don’t think you’d find in my letter what Van Milne was saying to Ngugi. Who is talking about standards? I mean...what are the standards? I am all in favour of revision or suggesting revisions, but I never ever prescribed revisions. When I took Bessie Head’s *Question of Power* on, Richard Lister, the novelist who had discussed Head with me, he said “I don’t think there is any great problem about her writing, it’s a bit dense ... often it is just a question of punctuation... a comma here, a comma there...” I wrote to Bessie and said “Look, you don’t need to change anything...you don’t need to change a comma... we will publish it as it is...but I think it would help everybody if you did work through it again.” She was so relieved to have the book accepted ... “Oh! I have already got back to it. I am already working on it...” When I observed Keith and Chinua working together for first time, they were not looking over their shoulders about standards... they were making up their own standards... they were making up their own minds... they were reacting to Tayeb Salih’s writing and thinking “This is fresh... this is interesting...it deserves publication.” We were short of manuscripts at that time and Tayeb just stood out ...

**NB:** But in some way when we look back at the beginning of AWS, particularly when Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* was published, Alan Hill, in his autobiography, explains why they hadn’t published anything before... he cites Amos Tutuola...but for him, Achebe’s novel was absolutely a new book... let me quote him “In *Things Fall Apart* we now had something entirely new from Africa: a novel which affirmed permanent human and social values in the context of a traditional tribal society in crisis, and which expressed those values in terms which the Western-educated reader could understand.”

**JC:** What about these people that Alan Hill cites as being enthusiastic about it, Gilbert Phelps, Donald MacRae, James Michie, Alan himself... they thought it was good... what they did not understand was that this was ... they had no cultural means of telling ... in fact...just was talking at a very African level below the Western competence of the presentation... it was a well presented book, but of course the deep Ibo cultural input they wouldn’t have understood it at all ... it wouldn’t have occurred to them really... people like Bernth Lindfors and others African critics began to analyse this in depth ... but the book, although it was written in English, was operating in Ibo, wasn’t it? They took on it as culturally good and competent ... but they could not sell it to a paperback house... the fact that it wasn’t picked up by Penguin or Pan or Collins Fontana meant that it was almost unknown in Africa ... I mean... I found it on



shelves in Cape Town, but Cape Town was a very prosperous part of Africa ... the general book trade already worked there...

**NB:** In your view, what did make the AWS successful more than series started by other publishers like OUP and Longman?

**JC:** I have already given reasons comparing with Oxford's Three Crowns, which, I think, was quite an enterprising series, but it was handicapped by just being plays and short stories – no novels. Longman was immensely successful as an educational textbook publisher, but the director of Longman African division, Julian Rees, did want the Longman series to rival the Heinemann series. But they were a bit slow on starting. Heinemann series was quite well established by the time that they really got down. They kept changing the title of the series, Drumbeats and other names... sometimes they put the Caribbean and African together and of course they have published Ben Okri's short stories and there were various other ones... Sam Selvon, George Lamming... they had quite an interesting list... but Julian Rees always laughed about us... "Oh, yes, you are the literary publishers... Yes we are wiping the field with textbooks!" which I certainly felt was the case.

But in fact it turned out he was deeply envious of AWS as he has said in very generous terms in recent years. I think they were so successful at school textbook publishing that the literary publishing was very much more of a sideline than it was for Heinemann. Heinemann was really only beginning to get into Africa at the same time as the African Writers Series started. The African Writers Series got off to a flying start because of the enormous enthusiasm of Van Milne, Keith Sambrook and Alan Hill. They were all quite committed in left politics and they had the confidence. They were absolutely certain that there must be more good writing out of Africa. If you got Chinua Achebe, there must be other good stuff around. It was Chinua Achebe and Van Milne who first read Ngugi's script at Makerere in 1962 at a meeting there. There were two major rivals. One was the Modern African Library in East African Publishing House in Nairobi, which was the publisher of first choice in Kenya. Although we got Ngugi, there weren't many East African authors to begin with in the AWS. It was quite difficult to get them... they were choosing to be published by the very active East African Publishing House. Alan Hill completely goes on about Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino*...we weren't the originating publishers... it looks as though we were ... we weren't ... East African Publishing House made a success of *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol* before. We were just anxious to get rights for outside East Africa ... Then the later date, Macmillan set up this popular series called Pacesetters and they were very successful. They started in Nairobi, but went absolutely enormously in Nigeria ...

**Nourdin Bejjit:** In an article published in the Southern African Review celebrating the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the AWS, you explained how decisions about publishing books in the series were taken when you were working for HEB. It seems that you conveyed a sense of being the only man in charge of running the whole series. Elsewhere you said that such decisions were shared between Henry Chakava, Aig Higo and yourself, particularly after Chinua Achebe resigned as a general editor of the series...

**JC:** Oh! But they were doing the same. You are quite right, perhaps I didn't make that strong enough. I am willing to believe that for people to say that I took a pretty firm line. I just had such massive material and I had to thin it down. Both Henry and Aig were doing that as well. They were bringing in those manuscripts, selecting them, and then sending them round, but because a lot of the books were coming from Nigeria and Kenya, a lot of people did not necessarily send the books to a company in Africa. Sometimes they did. Nuruddin Farah sent his first manuscript to Aig in Ibadan and he actually didn't like what I had to say about it. I did not know about this until a year or two later; it turned out that he tried it again on me in



London (laughs)...

Publishing is a subjective business as you get from Diana Athill as well. The fact is that it is a lot of pressures on you... not literally, of course... but you try and maintain some sort of literary balance. The problem was not just a cultural problem. It was part of the process of how much you accept what the author does and how much you get them to re-write and how you encourage them to re-write. Writing is a bloody lonely business, and so you want to encourage writers. There were times when Henry Chakava and I worked very hard, giving advice on a book by Thomas Akare called *The Slums*, which was set in Kenya. When he got to the third version, I began to worry that it was going to lose its freshness... our intervention was actually possibly removing a lot of the originality of this book. Henry and I thought "Well, we just had to go ahead with him now". We were both involved in encouraging this person who just dropped in off the street with a hand-written manuscript. I think the question you are asking me is absolutely right: it is for you and for others to question how my cultural values were affecting these writings...and because it was the African Writers Series, which had a very educational purpose - even though it was for a general market as well.

We did not do a deal on some of the books because we were bringing in translations from Portuguese, Arabic, French and a few African languages. We didn't do much translating from one African language to the other. Ngugi's great contribution was to face us with the problems of translation, which are not just linguistic, but cultural as well. The way he told his stories in his later novels were much more appropriate within the Gikuyu tradition. London and New York based critics and advisors tended to say "Oh, he used to write rather better" - this was their feeling - "When he was in his Conradian phase." Whereas, to me, it was fascinating to see the body of Ngugi's work and the way he was trying to accommodate not just his audience. He would not only translate his book, but got other people to do so. What he didn't do was re-write it for the Western, New York, British markets. We had quite a lot of difficulty selling *Petals of Blood* in the United States. It was turned down by Pantheon. The editor there took on various people, like Marechera, but he didn't think he could sell *Petals of Blood* in the American market.

**NB: Heinemann Educational Books is no longer publishing new writings in the African Writers Series. Some say that it is dead. As the 'godfather' of the series, how did you or do you respond to the 'end' of this interesting publishing adventure**

**JC:** I assume they are going on publishing the ones which sell well. But in one way, the question which we haven't touched on is: Should it have died earlier (Laughs) Well, it does not really die; because copyright exists and it goes on. There is a mechanical extension, but of course it is a different series, a raddled series compared with what it used to be. The great thing about it is that unlike other paperback series it went into publishing new writing, and that was its great original drive and that's why it was so successful. Of course forty years is a hell of a long time on a publishing scene. My successor, Vicky Unwin, was very good at fighting the reactionary forces within Heinemann to maintain a flow of good new writers, particularly new women coming on the scene.

As to your question of whether I was imposing metropolitan, cultural, neocolonial values on my colleagues in Africa, I think we were in collusion. But what I think is disappointing is that there isn't a very strong literary publishing centre in either East or West Africa. The crucial thing about publishing a lot of writers (talking about novelists in particular) is that if the novel is set in the country, there is obviously a built-in substantial audience because people like local interests and novels. Some of the best of those should appear in the international literary market place and get circulated internationally. But that does not mean that the others aren't performing an equally interesting task of informing and entertaining audiences in their own countries... this, in particular, happened in Zimbabwe in recent years. Writers like Vera were published locally and then sold to a publisher in the States.



When I left Heinemann in 1984, an extremely able chap called David Godwin who was at that time an editor at Heinemann (he went on to Jonathan Cape, published Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* and then became an agent and made a success of several Indian writers) said to me "Look, it is just distressful what is happening at Heinemann Educational Books, come and have a talk to me. William Heinemann has this proud historic record of publishing African writers, we want to get the game started again." He and I were very keen on this... that we should really publish African writers first and foremost for the British and American hardback markets and sell to the middlebrow paperback markets like Picador. It would have been much more appropriate for the African Writers Series to become like Penguin, a reprint series, if it had a lot of stuff to draw on. That would have been much healthier. The African Writers Series gave people the excuse not to do ordinary publishing. Africans came to us first and foremost and so we controlled the rights, and hardback publishers needed to control the rights.

We did two books with Nuruddin Farah. He even felt rather guilty when he told us that he had an agent, but Keith and I were absolutely delighted because we wanted an agent to do what we were trying to do, which was to interest other publishers... and his agent then had some difficulty in getting the book, *Sardines*, placed. He got it with Alison & Busby who were an enterprising, small, general publisher. But since then he's gone on and he had a distinguished publishing record in both America and Britain. That's the way things were beginning to move. I think that in many ways they have moved rather more in recent years. I know that Macmillan may have started Macmillan African writers series in recent months actually.



# Appendix 2

## Interview with Keith Sambrook

*Nourdin Bejjit*

19 September 2005

At the Institute of English Studies,  
University of London

## *Interview*

**Nourdin Bejjit:** *You worked for Nelson before coming to Heinemann Educational Books, what made you decide to move?*

**Keith Sambrook:** Well, when I joined Nelson in 1954, I worked first of all for Van Milne. I was brought in as we call an overseas editor, which had been Van Milne's role. Van Milne became sort of overseas manager and I became overseas editor. I, then, spent the next few years in Ghana and Nigeria because Nelson had made an arrangement with the University College of the Gold Coast as it was called then and the University College Ibadan to help set up university presses. They thought I had a suitable experience since I had worked for Manchester University Press for three years before I joined Nelson. I, therefore, spent quite a bit of time there talking to people about setting up university press and helping to do it. Alongside that, I looked after Nelson's educational textbook interest in West Africa. Then, in 1959, Van Milne left Nelsons and joined Heinemann. The story is complicated and I don't think is relevant, but is to do with Heinemann becoming interested rather late in the day in the African school and college market, and Alan Hill, who was then head of Heinemann, persuaded Van Milne to leave Nelsons and join Heinemann. I, then, succeeded Van Milne in Nelsons for the four years.

During 1962, Nelsons was sold to Roy Thompson. He owned the Scotsman Newspaper and he had Scottish origin, though he was in Canada. He built up an empire of provincial newspapers in Canada. And, I think, it appealed to him personally to own a Scottish publishing house, alongside his ownership of Scotsman newspaper, which is a very distinguished paper. Nelson was substantially owned in 1962 by the family. The only member of the family, while still alive and involved in the company, was a man called Robert Nelson. He came in more or less every day, but I think he had other interests. And he frankly sold the firm to Lord Thompson. There were other shareholders, but they weren't important. Robert himself owned a majority of the share as it enabled him to make the decision entirely on his own. So, once Thompson owned Nelson, they started to think of changing the nature of its publishing, and they approached Van Milne, who was in Heinemann, to ask him if he would go back and develop, among other things, what we call in the publishing trade, an English language list which he was personally interested in.

During 1962, I had various discussions with Van and with the Thompson people about what role I would play, whether they wanted to go on publishing in Africa or for Africa, *for Africa instead about Africa by the way, very important..* And in the middle of this, Alan Hill, then approached me and said: "Look, Van Milne wants to go back to do this in Nelsons, why don't you come and join us?" So, we, more or less, exchanged the jobs during the late months of 1962, and I started with Heinemann on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, 1963.

Now, while being at Heinemann from middle of 1959 to, more or less, the end of 1962, Van had published or he'd been responsible for starting the African Writers Series. To this day, I really do not know and I am very interested to know, and I don't think that the Reading Archive reveals this as to whose idea the AWS was? Alan Hill whom I admired very much was a supreme egoist among other things, but everything to do with Heinemann Educational Books, Alan regarded as his. So, if you read his autobiography, you come away with the impression that the AWS is his idea. I was never able, later on, to extract from Van the exact origins of the Series.

**NB:** *How did the series start?*

**KS:** The first four titles comprised of two novels by Chinua Achebe, which Heinemann had already published, *Things fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*. So, the right to produce other editions of them lay within the firm. Heinemann Educational was essentially, throughout its



existence, an educational firm concerned with publishing textbooks for schools and colleges as well as general books, certain amount of monograph publishing, serious academic publishing out of the textbook publishing, but generally a school, college and general academic firm. So, the first four titles in the AWS, with one exception, are aimed at for use in schools. And the idea of producing paperback editions of two Achebe's novels was to make them available for study in schools in Africa, and specifically, initially, in West Africa. The second, number two, is a novel called, *Burning Grass*, which is specially written for the Series by Cyprian Ekwensi and aimed at school readers. It's really aimed at secondary school children. The other title in the first four is *Zambia Shall be Free* and this reflects Van Milne's own personal political interest in Africa as distinct from any literary interest. He had quite determined and firm views on political future of Africa, and that book is an account of a movement towards independence in Zambia by Kenneth Kaunda, but largely put together by a Methodist minister in Northern Rhodesia, as it was then called, by Maurice Temple.

Now, they don't entirely fit these four titles. They don't make a series. Heinemann was an educational publisher. They're aimed at school and college readership, and yet *Zambia Shall be Free* is clearly only or mainly of interest to people of which was the Rhodesia and people who were interested in African politics. So, when I came there in January 1963, these four titles had been published, I think all in 1962 and on the table or Van (got) handed to me a manuscript of Ngugi, *Weep not, Child*, and a totally unedited manuscript of a novel by T.M. Aluko, called *One Man, One Matchet*. There were some correspondence with John Reed, who we'd known in Edinburgh and taught in University College of Rhodesia in Salisbury, as it then was, about an anthology which he would put together with Clive Wake, who was a South African professor of French and Roman languages, also at the University College of Rhodesia. I knew John Reed from Edinburgh days. So, it was easy to take that up and as far as I know that was it. *Weep not, Child* had come to Heinemann through Chinua Achebe attending a conference in Makerere – I think in 1964 – and meeting with a young student who was then James Ngugi, and extracting this novel from him. So, I mean, AWS was only a small part of my job in Heinemann. My job was to build up their textbook publishing sales...

*N.B: That's why you came to Heinemann Educational Books...*

K.S: Well, it is not why I came to Heinemann. It is one of the reasons. I mean, I was able to do that, but also I had some university press experience which was useful in Heinemann.

So, I think in the next year, I worked on Ngugi's *Weep not, Child* with Ngugi... No, wait a minute. Let's get this straight. I don't think by that time I'd met Ngugi... I went to West and East Africa on behalf of Heinemann towards the end of the autumn 1963, during which something very important happened and I think I met Ngugi then for the first time when I was in East Africa. So, I was able to work on his manuscript having met him. But, I really got to know him in 1964 when he came over to do an MA which he really never completed at the University of Leeds and attended a conference on Commonwealth literature, which was held at the University of Leeds and which Achebe attended and gave a paper. And, it was while he was there that he wrote, what I think is his best novel called *A Grain of Wheat*, and we worked on that quite a bit. He also had written another novel called *The River Between*, which he actually wrote before *Weep not, Child* and we were able to put that in the Series later on.

So, to come back to what was available when I came in. I mean, the idea was still to produce material which could be used by African students in school and college. In a way, *Weep not, Child* and *One Man, One Matchet* don't entirely fit into that category, but they do provide fiction which could be used instead of novels which were still largely read in schools in Africa, which were not African. So these could be used instead of works by English and American authors. The *Book of African Verse* is aimed specifically for school use and that was put together by John Reed and Clive Wake. And around about that time, I can't remember whether this in 1963 or early 1964, a man called Richard Rive, was a South



African coloured novelist and teacher came over and I was introduced to him by mutual friends and he proposed to do a prose anthology for schools. He came to do some further study in Oxford. It was very difficult for coloured people to get out of South Africa at that time, but he did. And while he was here – he lived part in London, part in Oxford – he put together this anthology called *Modern African Prose* aimed at school use. He also proposed that we publish for use in South Africa a collection of South African short stories we did call *Quartet*. Richard Rive was responsible for that and through that anthology, I was introduced to La Guma's writing which I did not know till then and Richard Rive admired La Guma's writings very much and wanted anthologies to publish them because he was never published in England. And the opportunity came rather later. I forgot exactly when, but we were able to publish his novel *A Walk in the Night*.

Now up to that point, you can see that the aim of the Series was.... (Silence). It had not actually got a very clear aim, to be honest. But the idea was to provide material which students in school and college in Africa could use. Now, people like Richard Rive and Clive Wake who were personally involved in doing this, were teaching in the university, who were very keen to help develop the Series.

Another important influence in these early days was a man called Paul Edwards, who I'd known in Nelson's days, and we had done an anthology. I think it was not published till may be after I left Nelson, but we worked on it while I was still in Nelson called *West African Narrative* which was aimed entirely for school use. If you never read it, I recommend if you could find it. The introduction to that anthology by Paul Edwards, which set up the reasons for putting together an anthology of this sort, which was to encourage students initially in schools and later in college to read what was available in English by African writers of foreign literatures in English.

At that time, no African writing was prescribed for use by the Examination Boards in either East or West Africa largely because there wasn't much, but Paul Edwards believed that there was sufficient to put together at least an introductory anthology which might lead on to other prescriptions, and this is why he'd produced it. And his introduction to that anthology is interesting and we published it in Nelson. Paul, then, left West Africa and came to Edinburgh to join the Department of English at the University of Edinburgh to look after what they now call 'literatures in English', other than native British writings. And he worked there for several years. And, of course, I knew him well through Nelson days, and he said to me: "You ought to put in this Series selection from earlier writings by people from Africa, including Equiano." So, he did a selection from *Equiano's Travels*, and again his introduction to that is very interesting. So, again this was meant to encourage the reading of writings by Africans in place of or alongside literature by British authors. There wasn't very much literature in English to that point which could be used in schools. This is why Achebe's novels were immediately taken up by the examination boards and set as school-texts.

And then arose the problem of how to develop the Series; in what direction would it go? Then the question of how do you add to this Series? I don't know how much you know about publishing, but once you embark something like that on your list as a publisher, you really got to keep it going. It has a momentum of its own. So, you really come to look around and see how you can reasonably develop the Series. At that point, John Reed and Clive Wake said: "well, look, there is not very much published by African Writers in English which you can reprint in the Series, but there are some extremely good novels in French." Clive knew about this because that's his subject, and they introduced to the Series works by Mongo Beti, Ferdinand Oyono and they set about translating them. So, we put into the Series Beti's *Mission to Kala*, which is thought to be suitable for school use, and then Oyono's *Houseboy* and *The Old Man and the Medal*, which they translated themselves.

Then, the other person who was a great help was a man called David Cook who was a Professor of English at Makerere. David Cook had encouraged Ngugi in early days, and he



thought we ought to put together again a collection for use by students either in college or the senior forms of secondary schools, and so he put together this collection called *Origin of East Africa*. Again the intention was not really general readership, but school and college reading. Then very important thing during this time, Achebe had been working on his next novel, so that came to Heinemann. I worked quite a lot with Achebe on *Arrow of God*, and we put it into hardback (put it out as a trade novel) and put it into this paperback AWS, and Ngugi's *River Between*.

You see... quite a lot of decisions and developments in the publishing entirely depend on who you know, and people meeting people. And one of the people I knew was a man called Ulli Beier, who run the Mbari Centre in West Nigeria, and had already, under the Mbari imprint, published some very important works, including Soyinka's plays ... Um... I think he is the first publisher of Okigbo. He also published some translations from French. Ulli Beier was a very important early publisher of writing in English by African writers, before foreign publishers were interested at all. He realised that his organisation could give these writers international recognition or provide them with international readership. He was a very important catalyst at that point in developing writing, particularly in West Africa, and with his sort of continental, European view, he was not entirely restricted to what was around him, he saw what was going in the rest of Africa in other languages. What I mean is that through Ulli I met Lenrie Peters. He also put together an anthology of his own called *The Origin of Life and Death*.

It was through Ulli Beier that I met Lenrie Peters was working in London. He was a Gambian and a neuro-surgeon by profession. He'd been in Cambridge University. His interests were, apart from medicine books, writing and singing. He had been a leading member of the Cambridge University Opera House Society... His father was the editor of a local newspaper in Bathurst Gambia. And Ulli had put together a small collection of Lenrie's poems and we put his collection of poems in the Series, later as *Satellites*, No 37. But he had written, in addition to his poetry, a novel called *The Second Round*, and this was a new work and it hadn't been published before. And the Series could only develop at this point if it took new writings because there were not any existing writings which could be re-printed. So we had to go to look around for new writers and this novel was available. I think it's quite a good novel. It's an interesting novel. He never wrote another. But he is not as a good novelist as he is a poet, but it's still publishable. So, we put that in, and then we had some short stories by Ekwensi and through Achebe, a novel came to the Series by a man called John Munonye, who had been, more or less, a contemporary of Chinua at the University College Ibadan, and we publish that. Chinua, by this time, was a kind of advisory editor to the Series. So, he was also looking around for new writers to add, and Munonye was one, and other person from Nigeria, Flora Nwapa. We published her novel... I think the first, *Efuru*.

Now... about this time also, we were looking for somebody to look after our office for West Africa, and develop both the educational list and the educational sale, and various people were suggested to it. We didn't really advertise the job, because it was difficult to know where to advertise it. So, we would rather depend on personal recommendations of people who might be able to do this job. Achebe came up with one or two people, but strong suggestions came from a man called Derry Jeffares, who was then a professor of English at the University of Leeds and he had been in Australia, and I knew Derek very well. And Derek said: "Well, really one of the very best people we ever had doing the Leeds MA is a man called Aig Higo, who's now back to Nigeria and he's teaching there." So, I approached Aig Higo and he was interested in joining the firm. Cut the story short, we appointed him. Aig was a poet as well as a teacher, and he, more or less, a contemporary of Chinua Achebe and Munonye and other writers at the University College Ibadan, and he took an interest in the Series. Again, I must stress that at this stage, the Series was no body's main job. It was not my main job and it wasn't Aig Higo's, but it was something we're all interested in developing. It became somebody's main job later when James Currey came into the firm, but we all had other things to do.



You see, my job at Heinemann was to look after Heinemann internationally except in those markets where Alan Hill still liked to look after himself: Australia and New Zealand. The rest, it was my responsibility to try to set up offices in Singapore, Hong Kong. I was anxious to develop the Caribbean market because there had been a very strong interest in Nelson. I knew quite a bit about the West Indies and we developed an office there under a man called Ian Randle and offices in South Asia under a man called Leon Comber. We also set up a subsidiary in India... Then, there was East Africa to develop alongside West Africa. So, we approached a man I knew in Nelson days called Bob Markham, who'd been a bookseller and run a Makerere bookshop and I suggested to Bob that he join Heinemann and went back to Nairobi where he spent most of his life. He's very happy to go there, because he had a house in Nairobi and where he developed the East African office. He is ninety now, still alive in Surrey. So, my job was increasingly administrative liaising with these offices and also developing our interest in Europe.

So, we needed someone to look after the African publishing side, and James Currey joined from the Oxford University Press, I think that was 1967. From then on, he took over the Series. I mean I remained very interested in it because so many of the people I personally knew were associated with it. And James Currey and I did a lot of things together: I read most of the manuscripts. I can't remember exactly, but there were some titles, which obviously I hang over from my days. Some of them like T.M. Aluko's later work... um... may be some translations by Clive Wake... La Guma... and so on... But then, he developed the list... you know...

*NB: Well, before going into James Currey, and his years at HEB, could you shed some light on Van Milne's position and role?*

KS: Van had taught English in University College of the Gold Coast for a couple of years before joining Nelson. He was interested clearly in African literature, but his main interest was textbook publishing. He didn't have time during his three years at Heinemann to develop a strong textbook list. You can't. Textbook lists take years to develop. So he did other things including the African Writers Series, which was ready-made in a way. He had a very strong political interest in Africa. He'd been very much concerned with Nkrumah and one of the main occupations of his in the last years in Nelson was the publication of Nkrumah's autobiography. He worked on the AWS in Heinemann because that was part of his job and could develop it and create some sales. But, as you can see, when I inherited it, there was not a very great in the deal cupboard because he had a lot of other things to do.

Back to Nelson, he entirely devoted himself to English language teaching and developed an English language teaching list, and they (Nelson), more or less, did not develop their African interest subsequently. And at an important point – a discussion about what the British publishers did in Africa – it seems to me that there is an important point where I would say in mid sixties when it happened, that it really was no longer viable to publish for Africa. And if you look at James career, apart from AWS, which is intended, of course, for use in Africa, but also internationally... the rest of James's (lists) is largely about Africa not for Africa although some of it ... and this is true of other publishers, the major textbook courses on which the British publishers had made their fortunes and reputations in Africa had already been published by the OUP, Longman, Nelson, Evans Brothers and to a lesser extent Macmillan. By the mid sixties onwards, the old British colonies were now independent. Local examination boards were no longer organised and masterminded by the examination boards in this country (England), in particular the Cambridge University Examination Syndicate. They were taken over by local examination board: West Africa Exams Council, East Africa Exams council, and Caribbean Examination Council. So, there was no room really for new textbook publishing particularly for pre-secondary school courses. This had already happened and what there would go on being used, revised forms.



Heinemann, for example, came in to the market far too late to compete with the OUP, Nelson, Longman, Macmillan and Evans on primary school publishing. They even came in too late to compete on secondary school publishing. Nelson, the OUP and Longman had that tied up and there was nothing Heinemann could do from the sixties onwards to compete with the established courses, which in any case going to be replaced by local publishers. They could only do it through their local branches, Heinemann Nigeria and Heinemann East Africa. So, the momentum for publishing for African schools and colleges in this country, which had been happening up to the early sixties, shifted to local branches of British companies or to local publishing houses.... So, it was no good coming into mainstream textbook publishing for African school and colleges after the mid-sixties because, as I say, the control, the emphasis, the direction of education had moved away from British colonial educational system to local educational system...

*NB: In relation to what you've just said about the colonial educational system, I want to know how these British publishers sustained their business in Africa in the post-independence period...*

K.S: Well, they did not have any option. There wasn't any body to replace them locally earlier on, and the books which they still needed in their educational system were published, had been published and were still being published by the British publishing houses. Most of them were to establish local offices, either to promote these textbooks or to add new textbooks by local authors or to revise and bring up to date their textbooks to fit curriculum renewal at either primary or secondary levels. So, in the sixties, I mean Nigeria was independent in 1960, Ghana earlier than that, East African countries in the early years of the sixties. There was not really any option but go on using the existing textbooks in schools, and those were still published by the British firms, and were very still selling in a very large and still profitable.

The policy of the more enlightened of these publishers was to establish local publishing houses distinct from the sale houses which would develop new textbooks and new material for schools. And I think it is fair to say that OUP did this, Longman also to a lesser extent but they did, Nelson rather opted out, Macmillan – and that's a very... let's put it aside for a moment – Evans Brothers followed the policy of trying to renew and bring up to date their existing school and management of local publishers, and Heinemann did come in on this because Heinemann was essentially secondary school and college publisher. So through their local offices, they... it was too late for them to come in on the big bestselling textbooks. They already existed and there was no room to replace them unless you produce entirely new material for the revised syllabuses, but that could be done through local offices rather than from here (England). So, it was a question of, as I said, the more enlightened publishers wanted to go on publishing textbook material for the new syllabuses and the new curriculum through their local offices and, I think, I did this quite successfully there. I mean there were quite distinguished list built up by the OUP both in East and West Africa. Heinemann did, but, as I said, the days of major textbook publishing were over...

*NB: it seems that the established educational system with English as the medium of instruction provided a ground for the British publishers to flourish in Africa in the post World War II, particularly after the fall of the British colonial rule in Africa... I mean there was relatively a large readership in English across the continent...*

K.S: Well, the medium of education in the former British colonies remains predominantly English, in fact increasingly so. There was no diminution of the market for textbook materials in English because the numbers of children in primary and secondary education in the former colonies increased in the post-independence (period), and the materials which they needed were the existing publications by the British publishers. For a time after independence, I would say, sales of the existing textbooks or slightly revised versions of them increased. And these were gradually replaced, but very gradually replaced by local



published alternatives and they (locally published alternatives) could only republish to meet curriculum renewal and they could not publish in competition with what the British publishers already have since they did not have the resources either in man power, the skills or money. They had to wait for curriculum renewal, the introduction of new courses which local offices could bring out textbooks for which the British publishers might not consider publishing for, but through their local offices, most of them in fact did.

So, if you look at the history of publishing... if you look at the development of publishing in post-independence in West and East Africa, there are very few locally owned firms of any size competing with the branches of the British publishers. I mean in Nigeria there was only Onibonoje (press). They produced good textbooks, but they couldn't compete with British publishers in the publication of major courses. They didn't have the money, the resources, or the distribution. For instance Onibonoje couldn't really compete with Heinemann Nigeria on the publication of new science materials at school because Heinemann has science publishing staff they can send out – and we did from London – to help Aig Higo and his people develop new science courses. Onibonoje didn't have the staff or resources and in East Africa the same. They weren't really any major development in mainstream educational publishing. And, I think, this is true of the French. In French colonies, the French publishers had mainstream courses for use in the francophone educational colonies, and this persisted after independence because there were no single large enough local publishing house to compete. At any way, they set up subsidiaries of their own although they were controlled much more from Paris than the branches of the British publishers were controlled from here (London, UK). I think we, on the whole, gave more control to our heads of local publishing houses than some of the French publishers did. But the point you made earlier, surely is the main one... English *increasingly* became – not remain – in education and the same apply in French Colonies.

It seems to me the continuing, if you like, dominance of the branches of British publishers in the former British colonies through books that they had already published and through new books which they published in new syllabuses in new curricular. The dominance of these firms over any local competition was because they had money, experience, staff, publishing skills, development system, the whole infrastructure of publishing industry, which is very expensive to set up, and in Nigeria, the market for textbook publishing is large enough for a local firm to enter it. But, as I said, the one firm that I know did this with any success was always as a kind of 'third force'. They produced some good stuff, but never any mainstream courses. They did very good secondary school history course, but only a two-book course. I mean, they haven't got the resources to produce full-scale course. They couldn't have competed with us, for example, on developing new-science course.

*NB: but, in a way, if the British companies did not invest in this – or from another perspective exploit the – situation, these indigenous publishers could have received the help of their newly independent government and start doing a good job, so to speak...*

K.S: Yes... Um... perhaps one should be very careful what one says, but... um.... It did not take very long in South Asia, or of that matter, the West Indies, though they were much more smaller, for local publishers to more or less take over the development of new materials

*N.B: What are the differences, then?*

K.S: I think, the differences, again, resources in financial and trainings. It did not take very long for local firms in South Asia to more or less take over from the branches and foreign firms. They had the skills. They had the money. In African colonies, this didn't happen. I am afraid to say, to some extent...

*N.B: Was it because of a lack of a political will on the part of the African leaders to make the national movement more...*



**K.S:** As I said, one has to be very, very careful what one says... I think it is entirely a different approach... In Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia, they set about doing this... trained people (up), putting – not government – but individual firms. There was more government support in Malaysia perhaps for developing publishing in Bahasa Malaysia, which they wanted to develop along English as a medium. So there was a strong government support for some firms which produced large number of textbooks in Bahasa Malaysia, but otherwise as individuals, private firms. So that far eastern publishers would develop strong textbook courses, which more or less, replaced what the British firms.... This didn't happen in Africa. I am not going to say why, because I think that question other people you should ask and try to answer ...

**N.B:** *In your view, what was the philosophy behind the making of the African writers Series?*

**K.S:** Well, the early development of the Series was simply to provide literature in English by African writers which could replace, introduce... again, I think I have to come back to Paul Edwards's introduction to *West African Narrative*, to replace what was being used, but really there wasn't very much. Heinemann was in the position to do this simply because they'd published Achebe. Other publishers weren't in the position to do it because they had got anything which they could publish. The only other firm which did this was the Oxford University Press, because through their Rex Collings, who was James Currey's boss in the OUP. Rex talking with Ulli Beier produced the Three Crows' version of Soyinka's plays, but no other publishers had the material. So, they weren't in the position to do it. I mean Longman had no literature publishing of their own, let alone by Africans which they could turn into textbooks or reading material. Heinemann was in the good position, but simply on the basis of two novels by Achebe ... well, they had William Conton's *The African* and that was it. I mean, motifs were partly, if you like idealistic, but quite honestly like everything else in publishing, they were commercial. Here was a market which was untapped. Let's provide material for it... and Heinemann at that point could do it because they had Achebe, and the OUP could do it because they had Soyinka.

**N.B:** *So, what particular audience did the AWS target from the beginning?*

**K.S:** I can tell you that the intended market was not a general market, but the educational market, school and colleges. If there was a spill over, the sale to the general public, that would be a bonus. But the Series was not intended for – was marketed as – a general series. It was marketed as an educational Series, and the hardback editions of the new writers were really not aimed ... it was not expected that there would be a large sale of the hardback editions of the new writers in Africa, price against it is for one thing and the reading public in Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya and so on for new writers... the local reading public was really quite small and the hardback edition could only be afforded by, let us say, middle class professional people. They could not be bought by the general reading public, which, in any case, was not accustomed to reading literature in English anyway. So, I would say of course when James Currey later on – late '60s, '70s, and '80s – because the market for local general publishing was increasing. So, it was possible to produce... to put into the Series titles which would attract a local general readership for ... but up to, say mid- sixties, there was not a large general reading public in Africa. And one has to question for whom African writers were writing anyway. I mean were they writing for that market or were they writing for people outside Africa? I mean it is a question Achebe was always asking himself and trying to answer. I mean, he is the most honest person I know... and he has never been able to answer this question to his own satisfaction. Clearly T.M Aluko was writing about faults in the social and political system of independent Nigeria, which he saw as wrong and he was writing for an educated Nigerian readership and a foreign readership, wasn't he?



*N.B: Well, during the process of writing, he might have an idea to whom he is writing, but, again, I think that a great deal of deciding about targeting particular readership is also part of the publisher's job through marketing and advertising etc., so, I believe Heinemann has taken a great role in targeting certain readerships.*

*...Talking about the role of Heinemann Educational Books, Gareth Griffiths says that HEB has created African literature... how do you comment on this?*

**K.S:** I think that's quite wrong. Well... they didn't create it at all. I mean you can only publish what other people have written. I mean you can only publish what's available. And this question of readership... you see, Ngugi later on felt that writing in English was not enabling the readership he really wanted to have in Kenya. So he wrote in Gikuyu. The later novels were written in Gikuyu, because he wanted to address (that readership)... I can't think of any other writer in Africa who has done this.

*N.B: You've told me about a problem related to Macmillan's investment in Africa, but you wanted to put it aside for a while...*

**K.S:** Well, I think it is outside all of this, but there was a famous scandal in African publishing when Macmillan was involved in Ghana State Publishing Corporation. Macmillan seemed to take over state publishing through influencing local people. There was a court case in Ghana. So, that's on record. But there was also an attempt in East Africa, which no other British publishers did, to be fair, but Macmillan tried to. As I said, the days of publishing major courses, particularly the primary level, from the mid-sixties onward, even earlier, were gone because the local education authorities were introducing new curricular for which they thought perhaps they ought to have state publishing organisations. Ghana introduced state publishing organisation. There was an attempt to take this over. This never happened in Nigeria because it wouldn't have worked because Nigerians are too independent to allow that to happen...

*NB: Let's talk about you a bit... while talking to James Currey, he told me that Alan Hill, Van Milne and yourself were committed to left-wing politics...*

**K.S:** We were certainly committed to...you know... making sure that independent Africa had the best material it could provide at an honest cost, but... I mean we were commercial publishers. So, we had to do this profitably... I don't know what James told you about his own development... I mean if you look at the development of the list, say mid-sixties onward till mid-eighties when James had to give it up, I wouldn't have thought there was only any clear single or political or literary directive. You can only publish what's available. Again, the Series then had its own momentum. So authors would like to have their titles included. James published quite a lot of new writers, but also republished what had gone out of print or what was only available then in expensive hardback edition to develop the Series, but I wouldn't have thought it had clear particular stand. It's very catholic and very wide-ranging. And even in the early publishing... I mean, I was very keen to publish, for example, Mandela's first collection which was first put to me by (Ruth Stilling), but Richard Rive and Ruth first put this collection of his writings. I was very keen to put that in the Series...but you see... you couldn't call T.M. Aluko exactly a revolutionary writer. I thought Aluko was a conservative. Of course, the South African writers weren't in a particular social and political position, they were clearly in opposition... you see Ekwensi is hardly a revolutionary writer either... I mean he is a popular novelist, isn't he?

*NB: Yes...In her memoir, Stet, Diana Athill says that: "For a time during the fifties and early sixties it was probably easier for a black writer to get his book accepted by a London publisher, and kindly reviewed thereafter, than it was for a young white person." Was it*



*the guilt feeling over the British Colonial past that prompted these publishers to support African writings or was it the curiosity to listen to the voice of Africans?*<sup>1</sup>

K.S: Did she say fifties and sixties?

*N.B: Yes... Fifties and early sixties*

K.S: You know that isn't right... what was published in the fifties and sixties? Very very little.... Achebe's two novels were published in 1958 and 1960...

*N.B: Well, you know... Athill published some Caribbean writers... but could this be applicable to African writers?*

K.S: Well, there weren't any really, were they? (Silence)... In a way she is possibly right, but about Caribbean writers. There was fairly well established tradition by the late 1950s and early 1960s dating back even before the Second World War. And I would have said that British publishers were already fairly knowledgeable about Caribbean and West Indian writing and the British were selective. They weren't publishing anything which they didn't think would make its mark by the literary terms and in terms of sales. It is quite difficult to single out any West Indian writing of that period which doesn't justify its own publication. I am not sure she is right about that. In any case, if you look at the years she is talking about, British publishers had not published very much African writing ... French publishers had published more....

*N.B: What about the guilt feeling she mentioned?*

K.S: I don't think so really. You can only publish what you think will sell; (otherwise) you won't stay in business very long. You had to publish what was good enough to publish on its own merit and to sell a reasonable number of copies. And, again, publishers can only publish what's available. You had to look at what people were writing to see what was available for publishers to publish.

*N.B: Let's take the example of West Africa. You published Achebe first... He was later made a general editor of the series in its first ten years. Most of the works you published at that period came from West Africa...its seems that you targeted West Africa both in terms of textbook and general markets... it seems also that Heinemann's assessment was that Chinua Achebe would sell better there and that West Africans would buy his books and ,of course, the other west African writers. Was that a strategy for getting a footstep in the West African market?*

K.S: Again, I think it is not as formerly structured as that. The authors who were published in the first wave of new writing from Africa were largely West African anyway. There were hardly any... I can't think, apart from Ngugi, of anybody from East Africa whom we might have published, because other publishers were publishing as well... of course there was Okot p'Bitek, published by the East African Publishing House. That was very good, which we didn't publish. We weren't so active in East Africa, and I don't think we missed out very much, and then we published people like Taban Lo Liyong and Serumaga and so on...

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1: The Full Quote is: "Most of the People in our trade were more liberal than not, feeling guilty at being subjects of an imperial power and pleased that with the war's end Britain began relinquishing its so-called 'possessions' overseas. And many of them were genuinely interested in hearing what writers in those countries had to say now that they were free. For a time during the fifties and early sixties it was probably easier for a black writer to get his book accepted by a London publisher, and kindly reviewed thereafter, than it was for a young white person." See Diana Athill. *Stet*. London: Granta Books, 2000. p, 103



***NB: how do you see the role of Chinua Achebe in the series?***

**KS:** We tried to let him read everything that we proposed to put into the Series and there is a good deal of correspondence with him about whether we should include a, b, and so on... and he did introduce new Nigerian writers, but then he was very busy and after a time, we were using him, and he was happy to be used, as a consultant rather than originating editor..

***NB: He might also have used Heinemann or his position either as an editor or advisor to promote West African Literature, not necessarily in negative way...***

**K.S:** Yes, the fact that he had been published did encourage other West African writers to approach Heinemann and he encouraged them to do that, but, of course, we weren't exclusive publishers of West African writing. We never published Soyinka and I don't think we originated anything by Ekwensi, who was published by other people. Nwankwo was published by Deutsche. We did the paperback in the AWS. We published Amadi and Munonye and Nwapa originally. We didn't publish Okara originally. I wish that we had, but he wasn't published by us. He was published by Mbari. We never published J.P.Clark's poetry or his plays. So it was a lot going on apart from Heinemann. I mean that Series had to be published out in paperback format as a low price as possible to make it available to the widest possible readership and new writing and new writers don't necessarily want that. They want to be launched rather extravagantly on the international scene of hardback... and to be fair, we always try and put new writers into hardback as well as into the series in paperback. Of course, they didn't all sell a great number of copies, but they were available internationally.

***N.B: How did you choose the titles that were to be published in the Series? Were there any measures or standards?***

**K.S:** Well, up to the point when James Currey took the Series over, we were really very much concerned with providing reading materials for school and colleges and largely depended on re-prints. So there were really few writers in the Series up to that point. Apart from Amadi, Munonye, Nwapa, Lenrie Peters, the rest are largely re-prints or translations from French. Then, James couldn't do this because there were no writers to re-prints. So, he had to look for new writing. James had a wide choice of readers and I read quite a lot, a man called John Wylie, Richard Lister (he may give you some of these names). These were called the publishers readers who commented on material. Achebe tried to read everything, but once the Nigerian war was brought underway in 1966, it was increasingly difficult to let Achebe read anything because he was in the United States...

But again, this was James's job. It was his full-time job. So, he was able to select. I mean we rejected quite a lot, you know. There was a fairly steady flow of material being coming in... and then even if it wasn't submitted by the writers themselves, it was submitted by people who knew the writers. So, you didn't go out and look for it exactly, except for the titles which James thought ought to go into the Series because they were only available in expensive editions from other publishers or out-of-print. So, he wanted to put them into the Series and make them available again or make them available to people in a cheaper price. You didn't have to go and look... the writing came in very steadily...

***N.B: In your view, what did make the AWS a successful series, more than other rival ones?***

**K.S:** As, I said earlier, series have their own momentum really. And once it existed and had a large number of titles in it, then the existing titles created a market for new titles because people were looking for the latest title in the Series. They weren't all successful by any means and they weren't all aimed at the same readership: some clearly political; others were literary; some had a smaller intended readership, they were collections of poetry. Some were intended as textbooks and aimed at textbook market. So there was a considerable mix and



again as James developed the Series, in the 1960s onwards, the authorship came from a much wider... well, parts of Africa which we hadn't had submission for the Series previously. There were some Ethiopian writers; Southern and Central African writers began to offer their work. Again, we had a quite a bit of re-printing from works that had been already published by other publishers, either locally and not had international exposure or by British and American publishers who let them go out of print or had never done editions cheap enough to sell in Africa...

*N.B: It seems that Heinemann AWS is dead now...*

K.S: I think it doesn't exist.

*N.B: Well, they are still publishing some of the bestsellers of the Series, but they are no longer recruiting authors or publishing new writings. So, looking back throughout the years, how would you summarise the story of the AWS?*

KS: Well, because it was available throughout Africa and the readership in Africa from the 1960s onwards increased, the number of people who wanted to read works by African writers in English increased also. So, there was a ground and consistent market in the countries where English was either the first or second language. So, the Series flourished on the expectation of local readership of new works. Then, from a date which is difficult to pinpoint, this readership was not available for imported books because there was less money in Africa. Those titles which are available, say in Nigeria now, are re-printed by Heinemann Nigeria and I think the same applies in East Africa.... the imported books from Britain, where the AWS were manufactured and distributed ... it became far less possible as money run out in a number of ... well... in most of the former British colonies and the price of a single book in Nigeria began to be the same as, say senior lecturer's weekly salary, and the only way of making them available in prices people could afford was to do local re-print.

So that market was whittled away and, as I said, one has to look and see at what point publishers began to publish about Africa rather than for Africa, and it is interesting to know and I don't know, for what extent, say Ben Okri is available in Nigeria and how many copies he sells there? I mean his publishers don't have a ready-made series in which they can market him. So they got to market each individual title unless they give local reprints rights... it has got to be imported and the price even of the UK paperback is very high by comparison with local earning. So, I don't know about this and I would be very interested to know, to what extent African writers who don't have the advantage of a moderately price paperback series, which the AWS was. How they sell in Africa and what sales they have and will they continue, and to who(m) they are being sold and who reads them? I don't know... I mean, if the Series has been going when Okri was writing, we would have approached his publishers and said: "Well, Look, can we put it into the Series?" They would probably say: "OK", but then they would probably try to sell to Penguin as well. Even so, we would've probably managed to get his novels into the Series and had quite a large local sale. Again, a fact, I don't know and I would be very interested to know... the African writers who are in major series nowadays, Achebe, Ngugi, Nuruddin Farah are all in Penguin. Tayeb Salih is in Penguin Classics and who else? I would be very interested to know what their sales are...

I mean if you go to a bookshop and look at Penguin shelves – I have done this several times – you may find the old Achebe('s), but very rarely see Ngugi... you see, the series was successful whilst there were people very interested in developing it and professionally and genuinely interested in marketing it and then it was successful, but the market for it in Africa decreased, the economic decline of the old former British colonies, particularly the availability of foreign exchange... So, local markets declined.

In order to meet the readership, the continued readership in those countries, the only way to ensure that there were copies available was to give rights to local publisher, usually the



former Heinemann branches. And even so, they be very selective and the titles which they have in fact reprinted have been mostly those which can be used in schools and colleges and not those for general reading. If you look at Heinemann Nigeria's reprint list, it's largely titles which can be used in schools and colleges, but not novels which... well, they are not really titles which could become set books but are very interesting in their own light, should have a good general readership, but they are not available anymore...

*N.B: How do you see the relationship between British publishers, particularly Heinemann and its branches which have become companies in their own right both in East and West Africa?*

**K.S:** Is there a continued relationship? Yes, there is, but it is on a personal basis and there is even, I believe, a commercial relationship existing between what Heinemann in this country (UK) has become, which is Harcourt Educational, and Heinemann Nigeria and East Africa Educational Publishers. Otherwise, Heinemann Nigeria and EAEP represent Harcourt Educational in Nigeria and Kenya, and I am sure that Aig Higo and his manager have come to secure their rights to go on doing reprints of some of the titles and, indeed, to import from Harcourt titles which they don't want to reprint. I don't think a personal relationship is strong anymore. I think it is purely a commercial one.

*N.B: Regarding the commercial side of publishing, I want to see how Heinemann Educational Books with its network and its financial resources provided Africa with a 'window' to publish its own literature both locally and internationally. Yet, by doing this... I mean, wasn't that particular kind of investment a way of patronising African writers and, thus, African literature, or as Alan Hill says: "Oh, we have a duty towards Africa... we need to help Africans instead of taking profit out of their continent", or was it because there was no other choice, but that one and it was open for the rich and powerful to do the job since the local publishers were powerless and, of course, not up to... the job?*

**K.S:** (Silence)... well... difficult to say...

*N.B: Or, was it a mixture ...*

**K.S:** Well, of course it is a mixture of the three, but I think it is unrealistic to regard any form of publishing as anything but fundamentally a commercial enterprise. Heinemann could never continue to go on developing the AWS unless it'd been commercially viable and made profit quickly. You can't go on investing in a series which got three hundred titles in it unless it is deriving return and you get rid of it fast. And what's happened of course after, Heinemann was sold and then re-sold and sold again. Subsequent owners have decided that there isn't really a market for the AWS. May be a market for individual titles in it, but it doesn't fit any of the pieces under which Heinemann has been broken down into any longer. Heinemann was sold in 1983 as one firm. It was re-sold in 1985 as one firm. It was re-sold again in 1987 as more or less one firm and from then obviously split up. So, the subsequent owners retained hardly any of it. It does not exist as an entity anymore.

And with the decline of the African market as importers of British books, clearly you can't maintain a series of three hundred titles and hope for a good continuing sales in markets where there was any money. And the textbook market has gone anyway and has been replaced by local publishing. There was nothing to back it up. I think the AWS served its purpose, although what purpose exactly it served, I am not quite sure. But provided the body of reading material both for and about Africa which could be like all good series you could go to it and hope to find something relevant to what you want to do either to study in Africa or study about Africa. I mean, you could find in the Series which could fit.

Then another good question is: where are the African writers now? Certainly during the days of the AWS at its best, a good number of writers were living and writing in Africa. I don't



know... I mean, I am not up to date, I must confess, but I don't know many writers who are working and writing in Africa now. Okri is clearly not, who else? Nuruddin Farah goes on writing and he moves all over the place... But when it was at its best, there were writers in Africa could constantly submit in their work and I don't know what is happening. Are there any writers submitting their work to anybody else? ... In Any case, if they are writing in Africa, I am sure they are all looking for an international market. So, they be going to the big commercial general publishers with the hope of getting published and I should've thought ... I like Diana Athill's remark. It is not easy to get published now as an African writer...

*N.B: Do you have any suggestion for me or question that you want me to look at and explore in my research?*

**K.S:** I think one question which always intrigues me is: what would have happened to creative writing in English in Anglophone Africa if Heinemann AWS had not existed? Would writers who appeared in the Series for the first time have found other publishers or because it is no longer there, have writers in English in Africa felt that they don't have the same chance of being read and marketed internationally as they did when it (AWS) existed? I don't know the answers, but they are relevant questions and I think it did encourage people to write and believe they could be published. Because it is no longer there, do writers feel that no point in going on writing and try to get published because there is no body internationally interested in what they are doing? And also, are there levels of writing so that... perhaps... can it, unfairly be to say, that there are writers in the Series who would not be published internationally if the series did not exist because they wouldn't have been taken up commercially, or simply because they are good enough? I mean, Soyinka for example, never wanted to be in the Series. He said: "I am not an African writer and I don't want that label hang around my neck... I am a writer, but not an African writer." Of course he is right in my view, and I want to know to what extent being labelled an African writer has... and I really wonder about this, as inhibited both Achebe and Ngugi who stopped writing really. Soyinka hasn't stopped writing. He goes on and on... so I think these are unanswered questions...

*N.B: Well, I hope I can answer some of them...many thanks Mr Sambrook for sparing me this morning to talk about the African Writers Series...*

**K.S:** Thanks

# **Appendix 3**

**African Writers Series 1962 - 2003**



## African Writers Series 1962-2003

Year	Number, Author & Title	Nationality	Genre	Gender
1962	1 Achebe, Chinua, <i>Things Fall Apart</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	2 Ekwensi, Cyprian, <i>Burning Grass</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	4 Kaunda, Kenneth D., <i>Zambia Shall Be Free</i>	Zambian	Autobio	Male
1963	3 Achebe, Chinua, <i>No Longer at Ease</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	5 Ekwensi, Cyprian, <i>People of the City</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	6 Abrahams, Peter, <i>Mine Boy</i>	S.Africa	Novel	Male
1964	7 Ngugi [as James Ngugi], <i>Weep Not, Child</i>	Kenyan	Novel	Male
	8 Reed, J, and Clive Wake (ed.), <i>A Book of African Verse</i>	S. African	Anth	Male
	9 Rive, Richard (ed.), <i>Modern African Prose</i>	S. Africa	Anth	Male
	12 Conton, William, <i>The African</i>	Gam/S.Le	Novel	Male
	13 Beti, Mongo, <i>Mission to Kala</i>	Cameroon	Novel	Male
1965	11 Aluko, T. M., <i>One Man, One Matchet</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	14 Rive, Richard (ed.), <i>Quartet</i>	S.Africa	Anth	Male
	15 Cook, David (ed.), <i>Origin East Africa: A Makerere Anthology</i>	British	Anth	Male
	16 Achebe, Chinua, <i>Arrow of God</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	17 Ngugi wa Thiong'o [as James Ngugi], <i>The River Between</i>	Kenyan	Novel	Male
1966	18 Ijimere, O. [pseudonym for Duro Ladipo and Ulli Beier] <i>The Imprisonment of Obatala and Other Plays</i>	German	Plays	Male
	19 Ekwensi, Cyprian, <i>Lokotown and Other Stories</i>	Nigerian	Sh.st.Co	Male
	20 Gatheru, Reuel Mugo, <i>Child of Two Worlds</i>	Kenyan	Autobio	Male
	21 Munonye, John, <i>The Only Son</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	22 Peters, Lenrie, <i>The Second Round</i>	Gambian	Novel	Male
	23 Beier, Ulli (ed.), <i>The Origin of Life and Death</i>	German	Anth	Male
	24 Kachingwe, Aubrey, <i>No Easy Task</i>	Malawian	Novel	Male
	25 Amadi, Elechi, <i>The Concubine</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	26 Nwapa, Flora, <i>Efuru</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Female
	29 Oyono, Ferdinand, <i>Houseboy</i>	Cameroon	Novel	Male
	31 Achebe, Chinua, <i>A Man of the People</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
1967	10 Equiano, Olaudah, <i>Equiano's Travels</i>	Nigerian	Autobio	Male
	27 Selormey, Francis, <i>The Narrow Path</i>	Ghanaian	Novel	Male
	30 Aluko, T. M., <i>One Man, One Wife</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	32 Aluko, T. M., <i>Kinsman and Foreman</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	33 Samkange, Stanlake, <i>On Trial for my Country</i>	Zimbabwe	Novel	Male
	35 La Guma, Alex, <i>A Walk in the Night and Other Stories</i>	S.Africa	Sh.St.C	Male
	36 Ngugi [as James Ngugi], <i>A Grain of Wheat</i>	Kenyan	Novel	Male
	37 Peters, Lenrie, <i>Satellites</i>	Gambian	Poetry	Male
	38 Odinga, Oginga, <i>Not Yet Uhuru</i>	Kenyan	Autobio	Male
	40 Konadu, Samuel Asare, <i>A Woman in her Prime</i>	Ghanaian	Novel	Male
1968	34 Pieterse, Cosmo (ed.), <i>Ten One-Act Plays</i>	S.Africa	Anth-play	Male
	41 Djoletto, Amu, <i>The Strange Man</i>	Ghanaian	Novel	Male
	46 Brutus, Dennis, <i>Letters to Martha</i>	S.African	Poetry	Male



	48 Gbadamosi, B, and U. Beier, <i>Not Even God Is Ripe Enough</i>	Nige+Germ	Oral tr.s	Male
	49 Nkrumah, K., <i>Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism</i>	Ghanaian	Political	Male
	50 Clark, J.P., <i>America, Their America</i>	Nigerian	Memoir	Male
	51 Ngugi [as James], <i>The Black Hermit</i>	Kenyan	Drama	Male
1969	39 Oyono, Ferdinand, <i>The Old Man and the Medal</i>	Cameroon	Novel	Male
	43 Armah, Ayi Kwei, <i>The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born</i>	Ghanaian	Novel	Male
	45 Munonye, John, <i>Obi</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	47 Salih, Tayeb, <i>The Wedding of Zein and Other Stories</i>	Sudan	Novel	Male
	52 Sellassie, Sahle, <i>The Afersata</i>	Ethiop	Novel	Male
	53 Palangyo, Peter K., <i>Dying in the Sun</i>	Tanzanian	novel	Male
	55 Konadu, Samuel Asare, <i>Ordained by the Oracle</i>	Ghanaian	Novel	Male
	57 Dipoko, Mbella Sonne, <i>Because of Women</i>	Cameroon	Novel	Male
	58 Beier, Ulli (ed.), <i>Political Spider</i>	German	An-sh.st	Male
	60 Honwana, L. B., <i>We Killed Mangy-Dog and Other Stories</i>	Mozamb	Short-st	Male
	61 Umeasiegbu, R. N, <i>The Way We Lived: Ibo Customs and Stories</i>	Nigerian	Oral.tr.s	Male
	66 Salih, Tayeb, <i>Season of Migration to the North</i>	Sudan	Novel	Male
	69 Taban lo Liyong, <i>Fixions and Other Stories</i>	Uganda/Sud	Sh.story	Male
	71 Senghor, L. S., <i>Nocturnes</i>	Senegalese	Poetry	Male
1970	28 Cook, D., and Miles Lee (ed.), <i>Short East African Plays in English</i>	British	Anth	Male
	42 Awoonor, Kofi, and G. Adali-Mortty (eds.), <i>Messages</i>	Ghanaian	Poetry	Male
	44 Amadi, Elechi, <i>The Great Ponds</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	54 Serumaga, Robert, <i>Return to the Shadows</i>	Ugandan	Novel	Male
	56 Nwapa, Flora, <i>Idu</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Female
	59 Asare, Bediako, <i>Rebel</i>	Ghanaian	Novel	Male
	63 Sembene Ousmane, <i>God's Bits of Wood</i>	Senegalese	Novel	Male
	67 Nwankwo, Nkem, <i>Danda</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	68 Okara, Gabriel, <i>The Voice</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	70 Aluko, T. M., <i>Chief the Honourable Minister</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	72 Tam'si, Tchicaya U, <i>Selected Poems</i>	Congo-Braz	Poetry	Male
	73 Ortzen, Len (ed. and trans.), <i>North African Writing</i>	?????	Anth	Male
	74 Taban lo Liyong, <i>Eating Chiefs</i>	Ugana/sud	Essays	Male
	75 Knappert, Jan, <i>Myths and Legends of the Swahili</i>	Dutch	Oral tr.	Male
	76 Soyinka, Wole, <i>The Interpreters</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	77 Beti, Mongo, <i>King Lazarus</i>	Cameroon	Novel	Male
	80 Farah, Nuruddin, <i>From a Crooked Rib</i>	Somali	Novel	Male
	81 Mboya, Tom, <i>The Challenge of Nationhood</i>	Kenyan	Col.Speech	Male
	82 Dipoko, Mbella Sonne, <i>A Few Nights and Days</i>	Cameroon	Novel	Male
1971	62 Okigbo, Christopher, <i>Labyrinths with Path of Thunder</i>	Nigerian	poetry	Male
	64 Pieterse, C.(ed.), <i>Seven South African Poets: Poems of Exile</i>	S.african	Poetry	Male
	83 Knappert, Jan, <i>Myths and Legends of the Congo</i>	Dutch	Oral trad	Male



	84 Ekwensi, Cyprian, <i>Beautiful Feathers</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	85 Nzekwu, Onuora, <i>Wand of Noble Wood</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	86 Bebey, Francis, <i>Agatha Moudio's Son</i>	Cameroon	Novel	Male
	87 Dadie, Bernard Binlin, <i>Climbie</i>	C.D'Ivoire	Novel	Male
	88 Beti, Mongo, <i>The Poor Christ of Bomba</i>	Cameroon	Novel	Male
	89 Maddy, Pat Amadu, <i>Obasai and Other Plays</i>	Sierra Leone	Play	Male
	90 Taban lo Liyong, <i>Frantz Fanon's Uneven Ribs</i>	Uganda/Su d	Poetry	Male
	94 Munonye, John, <i>Oil Man of Obange</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	95 Ibrahim, Sonallah, <i>The Smell of It and Other Stories</i>	Egyptian	Sh. story	Male
	96 Cook, David, and David Rubadiri (ed.), <i>Poems from East Africa</i>	British	Ant.poe	Male
	97 Mazrui, Ali A., <i>The Trial of Christopher Okigbo</i>	Kenyan	Novel	Male
	98 Mulaisho, Dominic, <i>The Tongue of the Dumb</i>	Zambian	Novel	Male
	99 Ouologuem, Yambo, <i>Bound to Violence</i>	Mali	Novel	Male
	102 Omotoso, Kole, <i>The Edifice</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	103 Peters, Lenrie, <i>Katchikali</i>	Gambian	Poetry	Male
	105 Lubega, Bonnie, <i>The Outcasts</i>	Ugandan	Novel	Male
1972	78 Pieterse, Cosmo (ed.), <i>Short African Plays</i>	S.African	Anth.pl	Male
	79 Chraïbi, Driss, <i>Heirs to the Past</i>	Moroccan	Novel	Male
	91 Nzekwu, Onuora, <i>Blade among the Boys</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	92 Sembene O., <i>The Money-Order with White Genesis</i>	Senegalese	Novel	Male
	93 Knappert, Jan (ed. And trans.), <i>A Choice of Flowers</i>	Dutch	Anth.po	Male
	100 Achebe, Chinua, <i>Girls at War and Other Stories,</i>	Nigerian	Sh. story	Male
	101 Head, Bessie, <i>Maru</i>	s.African	Novel	Female
	104 Themba, Can, <i>The Will to Die</i>	S.African	Sh.story	Male
	106 Reed, J, and C.Wake (ed. and trans.), <i>French African Verse</i>	S.African	Anth.po	Male
	107 Dipoko, Mbella Sonne, <i>Black and White in Love: Poems</i>	Cameroon	Poetry	Male
	108 Awoonor, Kofi, <i>This Earth, My Brother</i>	Ghanaian	Novel	Male
	109 Obiechina, Emmanuel N. (ed.), <i>Onitsha Market Literature</i>	Nigerian	Study	Male
	110 La Guma, Alex, <i>In the Fog of the Season's End</i>	S.African	Novel	Male
	111 Angira, Jared, <i>Silent Voices: Poems</i>	Kenyan	Poetry	Male
	112 Vambe, Lawrence, <i>An Ill-Fated People</i>	Zimbabwe	Autobio	Male
	113 Mezu, S. Okechukwu, <i>Behind the Rising Sun</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	114 Pieterse, Cosmo (ed.), <i>Five African Plays</i>	S.African	Poetry	Male
	116 Taban lo Liyong, <i>Another Nigger Dead</i>	Ugandan	Poetry	Male
	118 Amadu, Malum, <i>Amadu's Bundle</i>	???	Novel	
	119 Kane, Cheikh Hamidou, <i>Ambiguous Adventure</i>	Senegalese	Novel	Male
	120 Achebe, Chinua, <i>Beware, Soul-Brother and Other Poems</i>	Nigerian	Poetry	Male
	122 Omotoso, Kole, <i>The Combat</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
1973	115 Brutus, Dennis, <i>A Simple Lust</i>	S.African	Poetry	Male
	117 Al Hakim, Tewfik, <i>Fate of a Cockroach: Four Plays of Freedom</i>	Egyptian	Play	Male
	121 Munonye, John, <i>A Wreath for the Maidens</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male



	123 Mandela, N. <i>No Easy Walk to Freedom</i>	S.African	Collectio (Speeches)	Male
	124 Dikobe, Modikwe, <i>The Marabi Dance</i>	s.Africa	Novel	Male
	125 Worku, Daniachew, <i>The Thirteenth Sun</i>	Ethiopian	Novel	Male
	126 Cheney-Coker, Syl, <i>Concerto for an Exile</i>	See n 221		
	127 H, G, and C. Pieterse (ed.), <i>Nine African Plays for Radio</i>	S.African	Ant.pl	Male
	128 Zwelonke, D. M., <i>Robben Island</i>	s.african	Auto/no	Male
	129 Egudu, R,& D. Nwoga (ed. and trans.), <i>Igbo Traditional Verse</i>	Nigerian	Ant.poe	Male
	130 Aluko, T. M., <i>His Worshipful Majesty</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	131 Lessing, Doris, <i>The Grass is Singing</i>	Zimbabwe	Novel	Female
	132 Bown, Lalage (ed.), <i>Two Centuries of African English</i>	Possi Brit?	Ant.Poe	Female
	134 Henderson, Gwyneth (ed.), <i>African Theatre</i>	British	Drama	
	135 Maran, Rene, <i>Batouala</i>	Martinique	Novel	Male
	137 Maddy, Pat Amadu, <i>No Past, No Present, No Future</i>	Sierra Leone	Novel	Male
	138 Owusu, Martin, <i>The Sudden Return and Other Plays</i>	Ghanaian	Coll. Pla	Male
	139 Ruheni, Mwangi, <i>The Future Leaders</i>	Kenyan	Novel	Male
	140 Amadi, Elechi, <i>Sunset in Biafra: A Civil War Diary</i>	Nigerian	Autobio	Male
	141 Nortje, Arthur, <i>Dead Roots: Poems</i>	S.African	Poetry	Male
	143 Mwangi, Meja, <i>Kill Me Quick</i>	Kenyan	Novel	Male
	144 Fall, Malick, <i>The Wound</i>	Senegalese	Novel	Male
1974	136 Sekyi, Kobina, <i>The Blinkards</i>	Ghanaian	Play	Male
	142 Sembene Ousmane, <i>Tribal Scars and Other Stories</i>	Senegalese	Sh.story	Male
	145 Mwangi, Meja, <i>Carcase for Hounds</i>	Kenyan	Novel	Male
	147 p' Bitek, Okot, <i>Horn of My Love</i>	Ugand/sud	Poetry	Male
	148 Aniebo, I. N. C., <i>The Anonymity of Sacrifice</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	149 Head, Bessie, <i>A Question of Power</i>	S.African	Novel	Female
	152 La Guma, Alex, <i>The Stone Country</i>	S.African	Novel	Male
	154 Armah, Ayi Kwei, <i>Fragments</i>	Ghanaian	Novel	Male
	155 Armah, Ayi Kwei, <i>Why Are We So Blest?</i>	Ghanaian	Novel	Male
	158 Kahiga, Samuel, <i>The Girl from Abroad</i>	Kenyan	Novel	Male
	162 Kayira, Legson, <i>The Detainee</i>	Malawi	Novel	Male
	163 Sellassie, Sahle, <i>Warrior King</i>	Ethiopian	Novel	Male
	164 Royston, Robert (ed.), <i>Black Poets in South Africa</i>	Brit/s.Afric	Ant.poe	Male
1975	133 Mukasa, Ham, <i>Sir Apolo Kagwa Discovers Britain</i>	Uganda	Autobio	Male
	146 Ekwensi, Cyprian, <i>Jagua Nana</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	150 Ngugi wa Thiong'o, <i>Secret Lives</i>	Kenyan	Sh.story	Male
	151 Mahfouz, Naguib, <i>Midaq Alley</i>	Egyptian	Novel	Male
	153 Munonye, John, <i>A Dancer of Fortune</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	156 Ruheni, Mwangi, <i>The Minister's Daughter</i>	Kenyan	Novel	Male
	157 Kayper-Mensah, A. W., <i>The Drummer in Our Time</i>	Ghanaian	Poetry	Male
	159 Mvungi, Martha, <i>Three Solid Stones</i>	Tanzanian	Oral st	Female
	160 Mwase, George Simeon, <i>Strike a Blow and Die</i>	Malawi	Autobio	Male
	161 Djoletto, Amu, <i>Money Galore</i>	Ghanaian	Novel	Male



	165 Etherton, Michael (ed.), <i>African Plays for Playing</i>	British	Ant.pl	Male
	166 de Graft, Joe, <i>Beneath the Jazz and Brass: Poems</i>	Ghanaian	Poetry	Male
	167 Rabearivelo, Jean-Joseph, <i>Translations from the Night</i>	Madagascar	Poetry	Male
	169 Samkange, Stanlake, <i>The Mourned One</i>	Zimbabwe	Novel	Male
	170 Mungoshi, Charles, <i>Waiting For the Rain</i>	Zimbabwe	Novel	Male
	171 Soyinka, Wole (ed.), <i>Poems of Black Africa</i>	Nigerian	Ant.poe	Male
	172 Ekwensi, C. <i>Restless City and Christmas Gold</i>	Nigerian	Sh.story	Male
	173 Nwankwo, Nkem, <i>My Mercedes is Bigger Than Yours</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	174 Diop, David Mandessi, <i>Hammer Blows</i>	Senegalese	Poetry	Male
1976	168 Echewa, Thomas Obinkaram, <i>The Land's Lord</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	175 Sembene Ousmane, <i>Xala</i>	Senegalese	Novel	Male
	176 Mwangi, Meja, <i>Going Down River Road</i>	Kenyan	Novel	Male
	177 Gordimer, Nadine, <i>Some Monday for Sure</i>	S.african	Sh.story	Female
	178 Peteni, R. L., <i>Hill of Fools</i>	S.African	Novel	Male
	179 Etherton, M., (ed.), <i>African Plays for Playing 2</i>	British	Ant.plays	Male
	180 Senghor, L. S., <i>Prose and Poetry</i>	Senegalese	Poetry	Male
	184 Farah, Nuruddin, <i>A Naked Needle</i>	Somali	Novel	Male
	185 Ekwensi, Cyprian, <i>Survive the Peace</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	189 Iroh, Eddie, <i>Forty-Eight Guns for the General</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
1977	182 Head, Bessie, <i>The Collector of Treasures</i>	S.African	Sh.story	Female
	186 Boateng, Yaw M., <i>The Return</i>	Ghanaian	Novel	Male
	187 Rugendo, Mukotani, <i>The Barbed Wire and Other Plays</i>	Tanzanian	Play	Male
	188 Ngugi wa Thiong'o, <i>Petals of Blood</i>	Kenyan	Novel	Male
	191 Ngugi and Micere G M, <i>The Trial of Dedan Kimathi,</i>	Kenyan	Play	Male
	192 Jahadhmy, Ali. A. (ed.), <i>Anthology of Swahili Poetry</i>	Kenyan	Ant.poe	Male
	264 de Graft, Joe, <i>Muntu: A Play</i>	Ghanaian	Play	Male
1978	181 Beti, Mongo, <i>Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness</i>	Cameroon	Novel	Male
	183 Okara, Gabriel, <i>The Fisherman's Invocation</i>	Nigerian	Poetry	Male
	190 Samkange, Stanlake, <i>Year of the Uprising</i>	Zimbabwe	Novel	Male
	193 p' Bitek, Okot, <i>Hare and Hornbill</i>	Ugandan	Poetry	Male
	195 Munonye, John, <i>Bridge to a Wedding</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	196 Johnson-Davies, Denys (ed. and trans.), <i>Egyptian Short Stories</i>	Canadian	Ant.sh.s	Male
	197 Mahfouz, Naguib, <i>Miramar</i>	Egyptian	Novel	Male
	201 Plaatje, Sol T., <i>Mhudi</i>	s.African	Novel	Male
	202 Vieira, José Luandino, <i>The Real Life of Domingos Xavier</i>	Angolan	Novel	Male
	203 Njau, Rebeka, <i>Ripples in the Pool</i>	Kenyan	Novel	Female
	205 Bebey, Francis, <i>The Ashanti Doll</i>	Cameroon	Novel	Male
	206 Aniebo, I. N. C., <i>The Journey Within</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	207 Marechera, Dambudzo, <i>The House of Hunger</i>	Zimbabwe	Fiction	Male
	208 Brutus, Dennis, <i>Stubborn Hope</i>	S.Africa	Poetry	Male
	209 Idris, Yusuf, <i>The Cheapest Nights: Short Stories</i>	Egyptian	Sh.story	Male
	210 Amadi, Elechi, <i>The Slave</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male



	268 Sepamla, Siphos, <i>A Ride on the Whirlwind</i>	S.African	Novel	Male
1979	194 Armah, Ayi Kwei, <i>The Healers: An Historical Novel</i>	Ghanaian	Novel	Male
	204 Mulaisho, Dominic, <i>The Smoke that Thunders</i>	Zambian	Novel	Male
	211 Kunene, Mazisi, <i>Emperor Shaka the Great</i>	S.African	Poetry	Male
	212 La Guma, Alex, <i>Time of the Butcherbird</i>	s.African	Novel	Male
	213 Iroh, Eddie, <i>Toads of War</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	215 Wolfers, Michael (ed. And trans.), <i>Poems from Angola</i>	British	Ant.Poe	Male
	217 Biko, Steve, <i>I Write What I Like</i>	S.African	Essays	Male
	218 Armah, Ayi Kwei, <i>Two Thousand Seasons</i>	Ghanaian	Novel	Male
	219 Kenyatta, Jomo, <i>Facing Mount Kenya</i>	Kenyan	Study	Male
	227 Emecheta, Buchi, <i>The Joys of Motherhood</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Female
1980	198 Cabral, A., <i>Unity and Struggle: Speeches and Writings</i>	Guinea-Biss	Col.speech	Male
	199 Sassine, Williams, <i>Wirriyamu</i>	Guinea	Novel	Male
	214 Beti, Mongo, <i>Remember Ruben</i>	Cameroon	Novel	Male
	216 Yirenkyi, Asiedu, <i>Kivuli</i>	Ghanaian	Col.plays	Male
	221 Cheney-C., S., <i>The Graveyard Also Has Teeth: Poems</i>	Sierra L.	Poetry	Male
	222 Vieira, José Luandino, <i>Luuanda</i>	Angola	Sh.story	Male
	223 Ghanem, Fathy, <i>The Man Who Lost his Shadow</i>	Egyptian	Novel	Male
	226 Farah, Nuruddin, <i>Sweet and Sour Milk</i>	Somali	Novel	Male
	230 Feinberg, Barry (ed.), <i>Poets to the People</i>	S.African	Ant.Poem	Male
	231 Jumbam, Kenjo, <i>The White Man of God</i>	Cameroon	Novel	Male
	233 Nyamfukudza, S., <i>The Non-Believer's Journey</i>	Zimbabwe	Novel	Male
	237 Marechera, Dambudzo, <i>Black Sunlight</i>	Zimbabwe	Novel	Male
1981	220 Head, Bessie, <i>Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind</i>	S.African	Historical	Female
	224 Kente, Gibson, <i>South African People's Plays</i>	S.African	Ant.plays	Male
	225 Mahfouz, Naguib, <i>Children of Gebelawi</i>	Egyptian	Novel	Male
	228 Hussein, Taha, <i>An Egyptian Childhood</i>	Egyptian	Autobio	Male
	229 Mofolo, Thomas, <i>Chaka</i>	Lesotho	Novel	Male
	232 Johnson-Davies, Denys (ed. and trans.), <i>Egyptian One-Act Plays</i>	Canadian	Ant.plays	Male
	234 Kunene, Mazisi, <i>Anthem of the Decades</i>	S.African	Poetry	Male
	236 Mapanje, Jack, <i>Of Chameleons and Gods</i>	Malawi	Poetry	Male
	238 Peters, Lenrie, <i>Selected Poetry</i>	Gambian	Poetry	Male
	239 Kourouma, Ahmadou, <i>The Suns of Independence</i>	C. D'Ivoire	Novel	Male
	240 Ngugi wa Thiong'o, <i>Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary</i>	Kenyan	Memoir	Male
	241 Akare, Thomas, <i>The Slums</i>	Kenyan	Novel	Male
	243 Mutloatse, M., (ed.), <i>Africa South: Contemporary Writings</i>	s.African	Antho	Male
	248 Bâ, Mariama, <i>So Long A Letter</i>	Senegalese	Novel	Female
	249 Obasanjo, General Olusegun, <i>My Command</i>	Nigerian	Autobio	Male
	251 Lewin, Hugh, <i>Bandiet: Seven Years in a South African Prison</i>	s.African	Autobio	Male
1982	200 Ngugi wa Thiong'o, <i>Devil on the Cross</i>	Kenyan	Novel	Male
	235 Kunene, Mazisi, <i>The Ancestors and the Sacred Mountain</i>	S.African	Poetry	Male
	242 Aluko, T. M., <i>Wrong Ones in the Dock</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	244 Ya-Otto, John, <i>Battlefront Namibia: An</i>	Namibian	Autobio	Male



	<i>Autobiography</i>			
	246 Ngugi W.T. & Ngugi wa Mirii, <i>I Will Marry When I Want</i>	Kenyan	Play	Male
	252 Farah, Nuruddin, <i>Sardines</i>	Somali	Novel	Male
	255 Iroh, Eddie, <i>The Siren in the Night</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
1983	250 Sembene Ousmane, <i>The Last of the Empire</i>	Senegalese	Novel	Male
	253 Aniebo, I. N. C., <i>Of Wives, Talismans and the Dead</i>	Nigerian	Sh.Story	Male
	254 Scanlon, Paul A. (ed.), <i>Stories from Central and Southern Africa</i>	S.African	Fiction	Male
	256 Bruner, Charlotte (ed.), <i>Unwinding Threads</i>	American	Anthology	Female
	257 Calder, Angus, Jack Mapanje, Cosmo Pieterse (eds.), <i>Summer Fires: New Poetry of Africa</i>	S.African, Malawi	Anth.Poe	Male
	263 Serote, Mongane Wally, <i>To Every Birth Its Blood</i>	S.African	Novel	Male
	269 Pepetela [Artur Pestana], <i>Mayombe</i>	Angolan	Novel	Male
1984	261 Anyidoho, Kofi, <i>A Harvest of Our Dreams</i>	Ghanaian	Poetry	Male
	266 p' Bitek, Okot, <i>Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol</i>	Ugandan	Poetry	Male
	267. Idris, Yusuf, <i>Rings of Burnished Brass</i>	Egyptian	Sh.Story	Male
1985	258 Pheto, Molefe, <i>And Night Fell</i>	S.African	Autobio	Male
	270 Achebe, Chinua, and C. L. Innes (ed.), <i>African Short Stories</i>	Niger-Austr	Ant.Sh.St	M/F
	Rifaat, Alifa, <i>Distant View of a Minaret and Other Stories</i> , trans. by Denys Johnson-Davies	Egyptian	Sh.Story	Female
1986	262 Nagenda, John, <i>The Seasons of Thomas Tebo</i>	Uganda	Novel	Male
	Amadi, Elechi, <i>Estrangement</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	Echewa, T.Obinkaram, <i>The Crippled Dancer</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
1987	Lopes, Henri, <i>Tribaliks</i>	Congo	Novel	Male
	247. Head, Bessie, <i>When Rain Clouds Gather</i>	S.African	Novel	Female
	Sembene Ousmane, <i>Black Docker</i>	Senegalese	Novel	Male
	Rive, Richard, <i>Buckingham Palace</i>	s.African	Novel	Male
	Tambo, Oliver, <i>Preparing for Power</i>	S.Africa	Essays	Male
1988	Achebe, Chinua, <i>Anthills of the Savannah</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	Karodia, Farida, <i>Coming Home and Other Stories</i>	S.African	Sh.Story	Female
1989	Anyidoho, Kofi, Peter Porter and Musaemura Zimunya (ed.), <i>The Fate of Vultures: New Poetry of Africa. An Anthology of Entries from the 1988 BBC Arts and Africa Poetry Award, 1989</i>	Nigerian	Anth. of Poetry	Male
	Laing, Kojo B, <i>Godhorse</i>	Ghanaian	Poetry	Male
	Mahjoub, Jamal, <i>Navigation of a Rainmaker</i>	Sudanese	Novel	Male
	Mungoshi, C. <i>The Setting Sun and the Rolling World</i>	Zimbabwe	Sh.Story	Male
	Ngugi wa Thiong'o, <i>Matigari</i>	Kenyan	Novel	Male
	Vassanji, M[oyez] G., <i>Gunny Sack</i>	Kenyan	Novel	Male
	Wangusa, Timothy, <i>Upon This Mountain</i>	Ugandan	Novel	Male
1990	Cheney-Coker, <i>Last Harmattan of Alusine Dunbar</i>	Sierra L.	Novel	Male
	Cheney-Coker, S. <i>The Blood in the Desert's Eyes</i>	Sierra L.	Poetry	Male
	Chinodya, Shimmer, <i>Harvest of Thorns</i>	Zimbabwea	Novel	Male
	Couto, Mia, <i>Voices Made Night</i>	Mozamb	Sh.Story	Male
	Gool, Réshard, <i>Cape Town Coolie</i>	S.African	Novel	Male
	Head, Bessie, <i>A Woman Alone</i>	S.African	Autob/essa	Female
	Head, Bessie, <i>Tales of Tenderness and Power</i>	S.African	Sh.Stories	Female



	Hove, Chenjerai, <i>Bones</i> ,	Zimbabwe	Novel	Male
	Maja-Pearce, A. <i>The Heinemann Book of African Poetry in English</i>	Nigerian	Ant.Poetry	Male
1991	Akwanya, Amechi, <i>Orimili</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	Chipasula, Frank M., <i>Whispers in the Wings</i>	Malawi	Poetry	Male
	Gordimer, Nadine, <i>Crimes of Conscience</i>	S.African	Sh.Story	Female
	Ojaide, Tanure, <i>Blood of Peace</i>	Nigerian	Poetry	Male
1992	Achebe, C. & C.I. <i>Book of Contemporary African short stories</i>	Nigerian	Ant.Sh.St	M/F
	Bande-T., Biyi, <i>The Man Who Came In from the Back of Beyond</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	Hove, Chenjerai, <i>Shadows</i>	Zimbabwe	Novel	Male
	Laing, K. B., <i>Major Gentl and the Achimota Wars</i>	Ghanaian	Novel	Male
	Mwangi, Meja, <i>Striving for the Wind</i>	Kenyan	Novel	Male
	Sembene Ousmane, Niiwam and Taaw	Senegalese	Novel	Male
	Zelesa, Paul Tiyaambe, <i>Smouldering Charcoal</i>	Zimbabwe	Novel	Male
1993	Bande-Thomas, Biyi, <i>The Sympathetic Undertaker and Other Dreams</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	Botha, W. P. B., <i>Reluctant Playwright</i>	S.African	Novel	Male
	Bruner, Charlotte (ed.), <i>The Heinemann Book of African Women's Writing</i>	American	Anthology	Female
	Jacobs, Steve, <i>Under the Lion</i>	S.African	Novel	Male
	Karodia, Farida, <i>A Shattering of Silence</i>	S.African	Novel	Female
	Mapanje, Jack <i>The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison</i>	Malawian	Poetry	Male
	Tuma, Hama , <i>The Case of the Socialist Witchdoctor</i>	Ethiopian	Sh.Stories	Male
	Vassanji, Moyez G., <i>Uhuru Street</i>	Kenyan	Sh.Story	Male
1994	Chimombo, Steve, <i>Napolo and the Python</i>	Malawi	Poetry	Male
	Couto, Mia, <i>Every Man Is a Race</i>	Mozamb	Sh.Story	Male
	Emecheta, Buchi, <i>Head Above Water</i>	Nigerian	Autobio	Female
	Emecheta, Buchi, <i>Destination Biafra</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Female
	Emecheta, Buchi, <i>Gwendolen</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Female
	Emecheta, Buchi, <i>In the Ditch</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Female
	Emecheta, Buchi, <i>Kehinde</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Female
	Emecheta, Buchi, <i>Second Class Citizen</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Female
	Hirson, D., <i>The Heinemann Book of South African Short Stories</i>	South Africa	Antho	Male
	Mahjoub, Jamal, <i>Wings of Dust</i>	Sudanese	Novel	Male
	Sam, Agnes, <i>Jesus is Indian</i>	S.African	Sh.Story	Female
1995	Beyala, Calixthe, <i>Loukoum</i>	Cameroon	Novel	Female
	Botha, W. P. B., <i>Wantok</i>	S.African	Novel	Male
	Chipasula, Stella, and Frank Chipasula (ed.), <i>The Heinemann Book of African Women's Poetry</i>	Malawi	Ant.Poe	M/F
	Collen, Lindsey, <i>The Rape of Sita</i>	S.African	Novel	Female
	Darko, Amma, <i>Beyond the Horizon</i>	Ghanaian	Novel	Female
	Emecheta, Buchi, <i>Slave Girl</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Female
	Emecheta, Buchi, <i>The Bride Price</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Female
	Head, Bessie, <i>The Cardinals with Meditations</i>	S.African	Sh.Story	Female
	Jacobs, Steve, <i>The Enemy Within</i>	S.African	Novel	Male
	Sobott-Mogwe, Gaele, <i>Colour Me Blue</i>	S. African!	Sh.Story	Male
	Tansi, Sony L., <i>The Seven Solitudes of Lorsa Lopez</i>	d.r.o.Cong	Novel	Male
1996	Accad, Evelyne, <i>Wounding Words: A Woman's</i>	Tunisia	Novel	Female



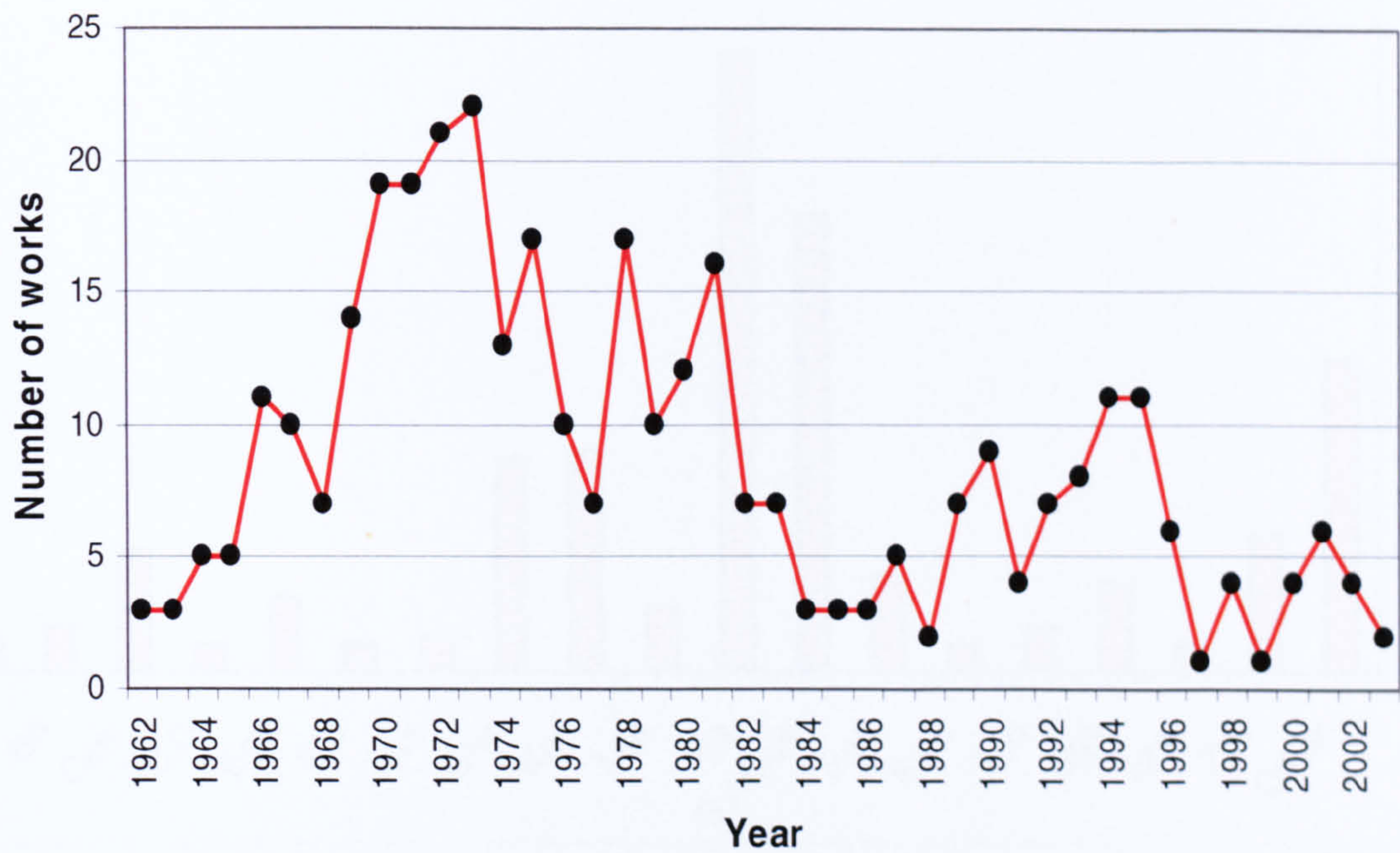
	<i>Journal in Tunisia</i> , trans. by Dr Cynthia T. Hahn			
	Beyala, Calixthe, <i>Your Name Shall be Tanga</i>	Cameroon	Novel	Female
	Beyala, Calixthe, <i>Sun Hath Looked Upon Me</i>	Cameroon	Novel	Female
	Mahjoub, Jamal, <i>In the Hour of Signs</i>	Sudanese	Novel	Male
	Pepetela [Artur Pestana], <i>Yaka</i>	Angolan	Novel	Male
	Jacobs, Rayda, <i>Eyes of the Sky</i>	S.African	Novel	Female
1997	Botha, W. P. B., <i>A Duty of Memory</i>	S.African	Novel	Male
1998	Darko, Amma, <i>The Housemaid</i>	Ghanaian	Novel	Female
	Kanengoni, Alexander, <i>Echoing Silences</i>	Zimbabwe	Novel	Male
	King-Aribisala, Karen, <i>Kicking Tongues</i>	Guyanese	Sh.Story	Female
	Kwakye, Benjamin, <i>The Clothes of Nakedness</i>	Ghanaian	Novel	Male
1999	Vera, Yvonne (ed.), <i>Opening Spaces</i>	Zimbabwe	Anthology	Female
2000	Emecheta, Buchi, <i>The New Tribe</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Female
	Ndibe, Okey, <i>Arrows of Rain</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	Oguine, Ike, <i>A Squatter's Tale</i>	Nigerian	Novel	Male
	Sinyangwe, Binwell, <i>A Cowrie of Hope</i>	Zambian	Novel	Male
2001	Aboulela, Leila, <i>The Translator</i>	Sudanese	Novel	Female
	Andreas, Neshani, <i>The Purple Violet of Oshaantu</i>	Namibian	Novel	Female
	Chinodya, Shimmer, <i>Dew in the Morning</i>	Zimbabwe	Novel	Male
	Chinodya, S. <i>Can We Talk and Other Stories</i>	Zimbabwe	Sh.Story	Male
	Momplé, Lilia, <i>Neighbours: The Story of a Murder</i>	Mozamb	Novel	Female
	Tadjo, Véronique, <i>As the Crow Flies</i>	C. D'Ivoire	Novel	Female
2002	Aidoo, Ama Ata, <i>The Girl Who Can</i>	Ghanaian	Sh.Story	Female
	Mapanje, Jack (ed.), <i>Gathering Seaweed</i>	Malawi	Ant.Prison	Male
	Pepetela [A. Pestana], <i>Return of the Water Spirit</i>	Angolan	Novel	Male
	Tadjo, Véronique, <i>The Shadow of Imana</i>	C. D'Ivoire	Novel	Female
2003	Aidoo, Ama Ata, <i>Changes: A Love Story</i>	Ghanaian	Novel	Female
	Mengara, Daniel, <i>Mema</i>	Gabon	Novel	Male

259. Chipasula (editor)*This is the Time* advertised as a prose collection, was numbered 259, but never published. (see Heinemann AWS' Catalogue 1983).

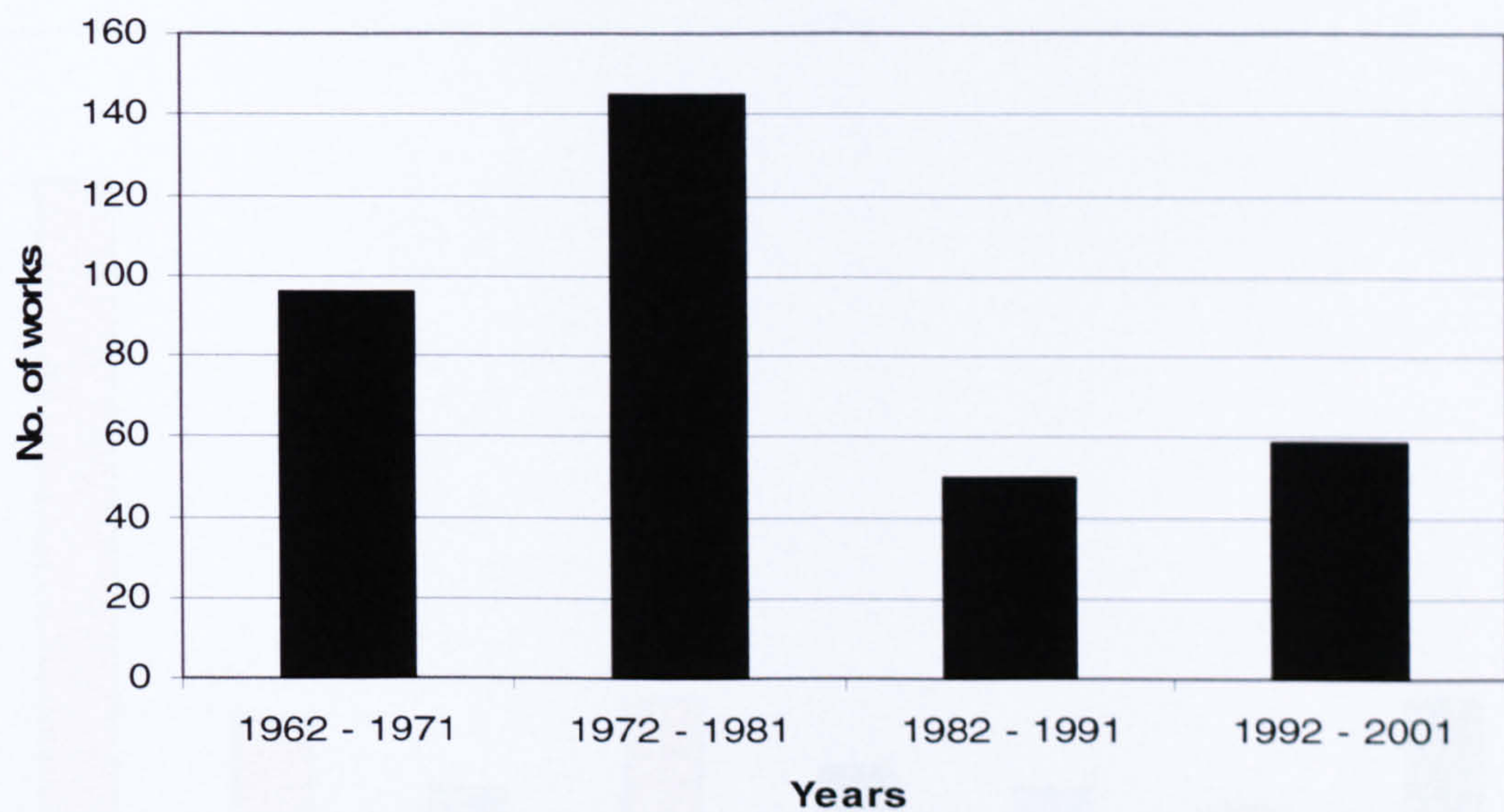
260. Awoonor, Kofi, *Until the Morning After: Collected Poems 1963–1985, 1987* [Note: this title was advertised as AWS number 260, but never published by Heinemann. (See AWS 1983 Catalogue)]



**Total number of works produced (1962 - 2003)**

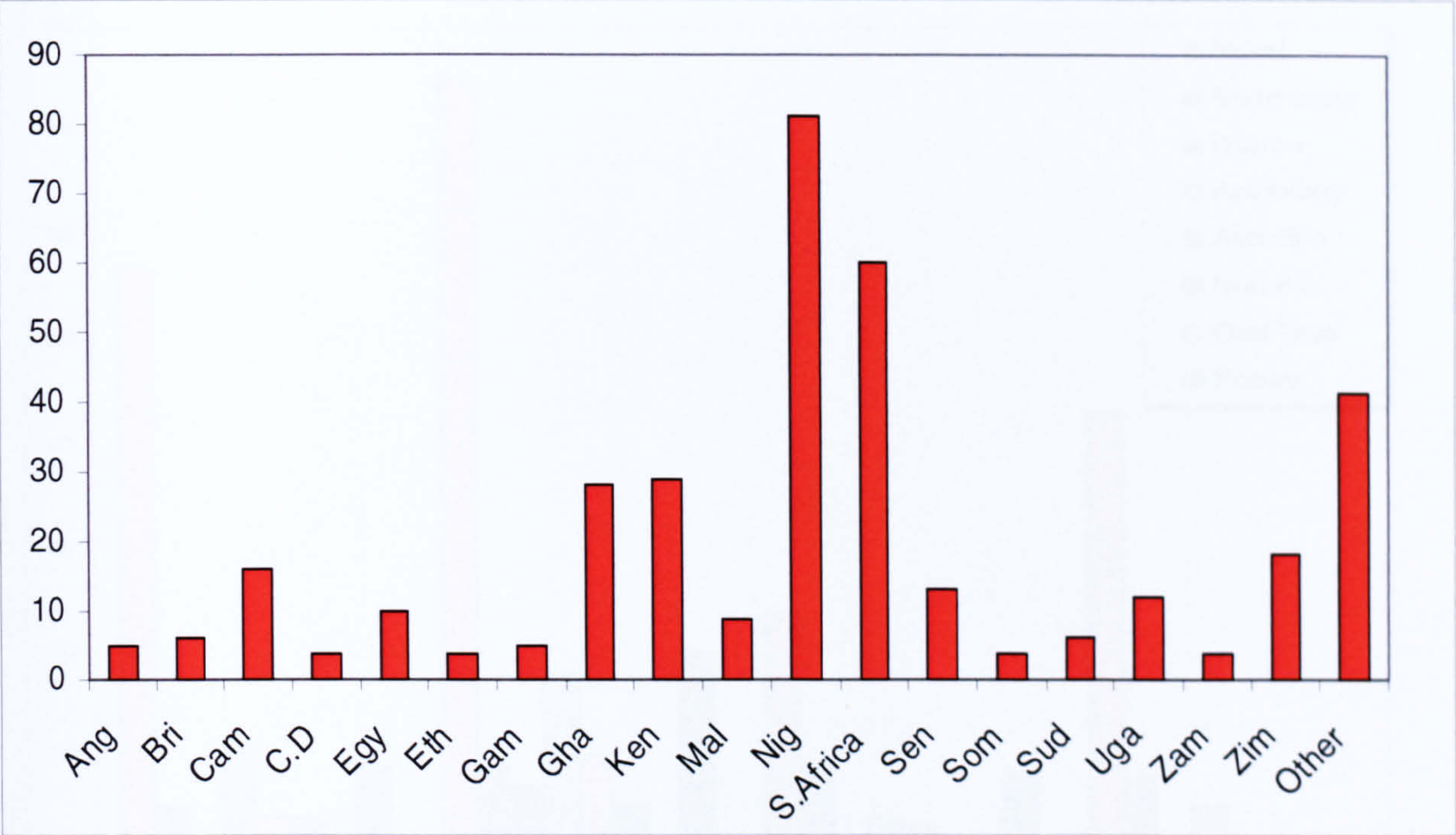


**Total number of Works produced (by decade).**

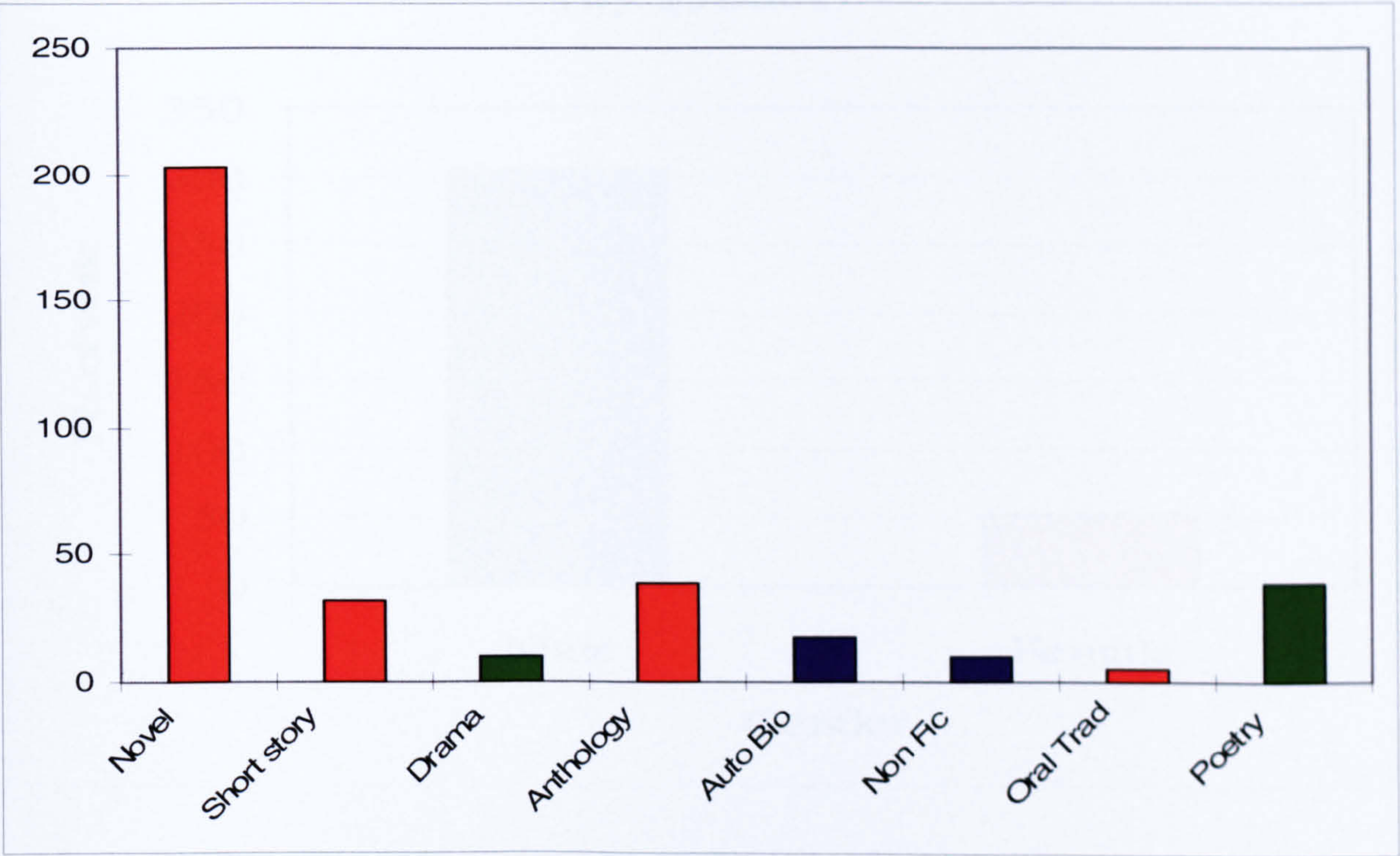




Total number of works produced (by country)

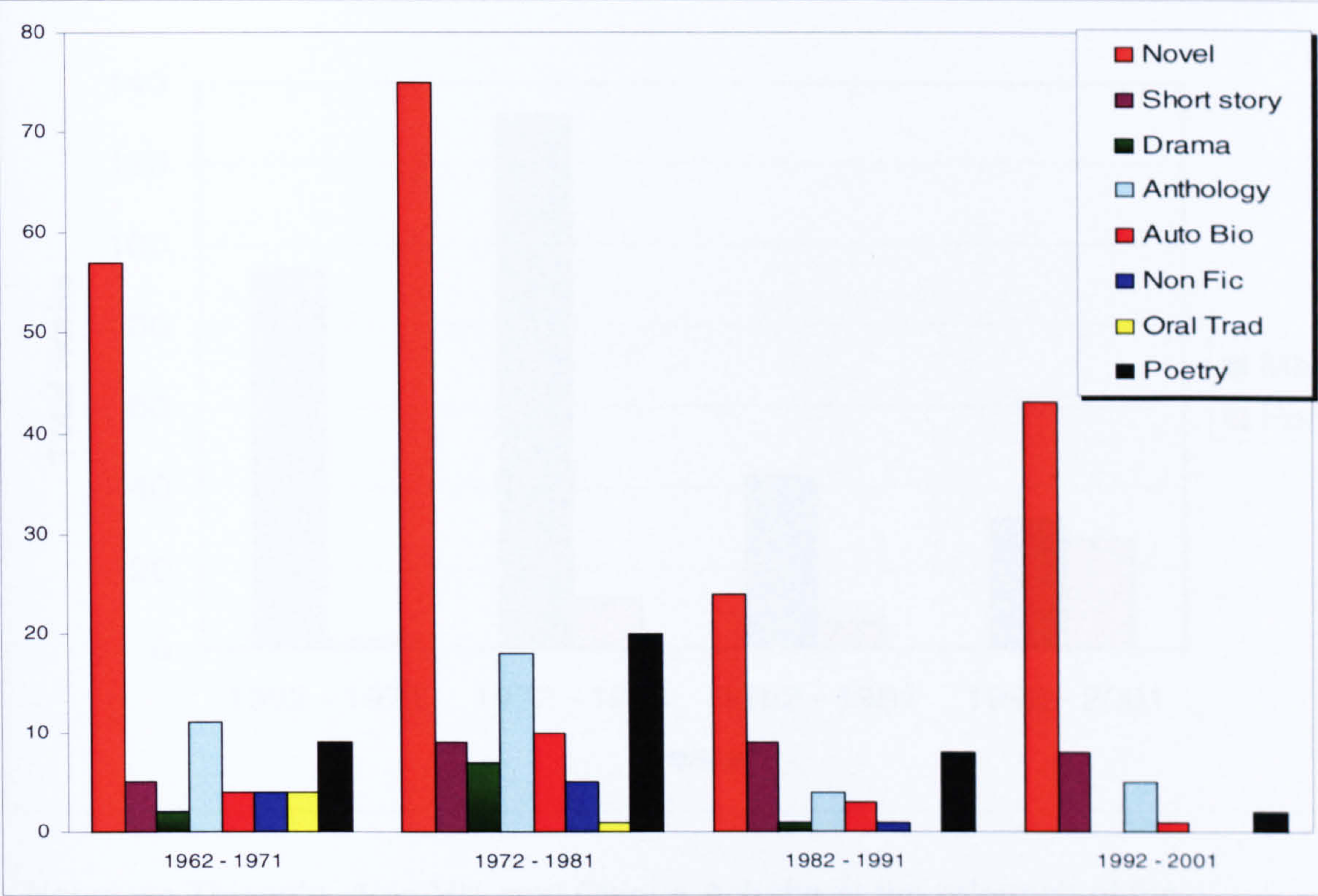


Total Number of works produced (by genre)

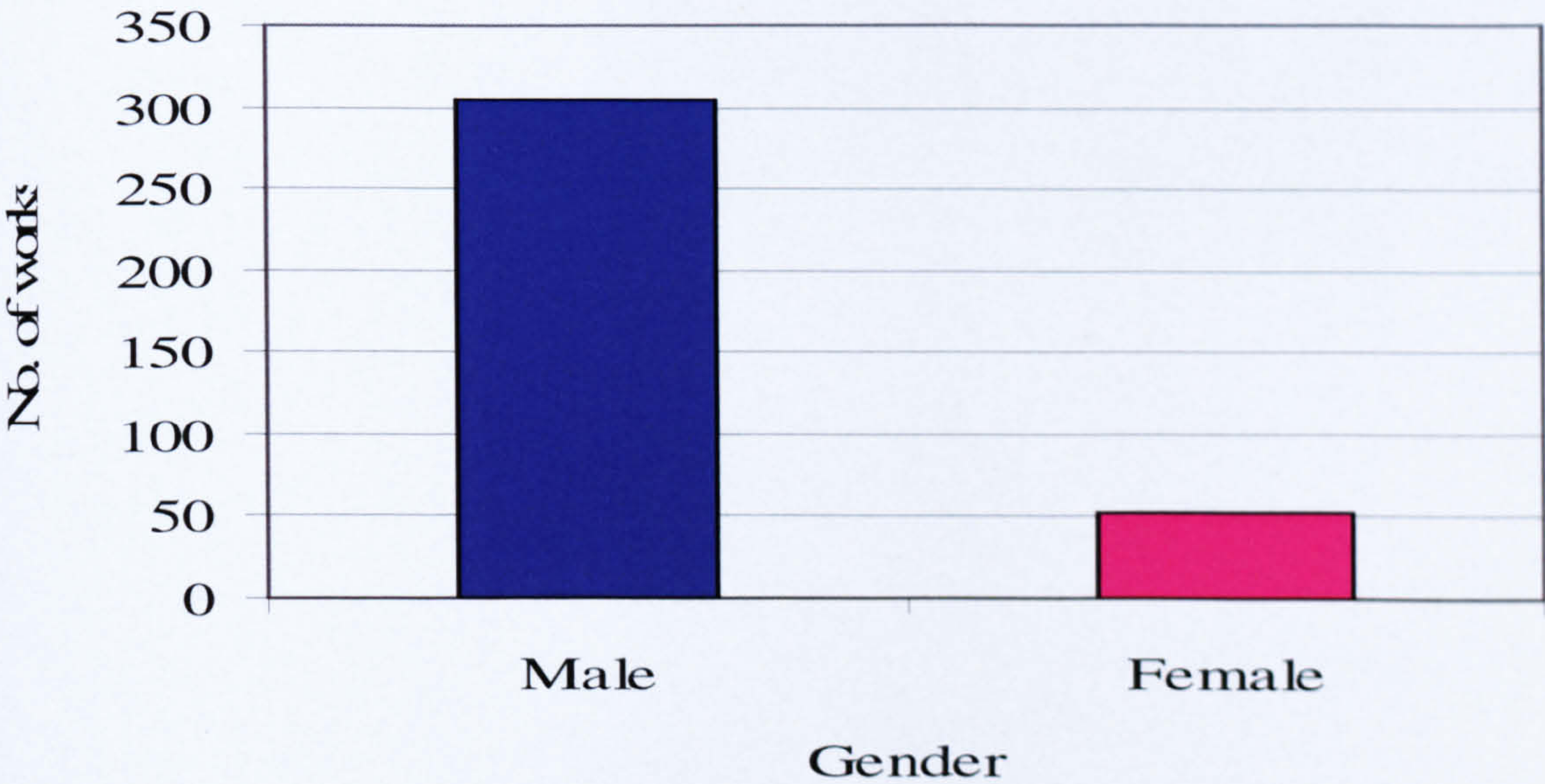




Total works produced (by Genre every decade)

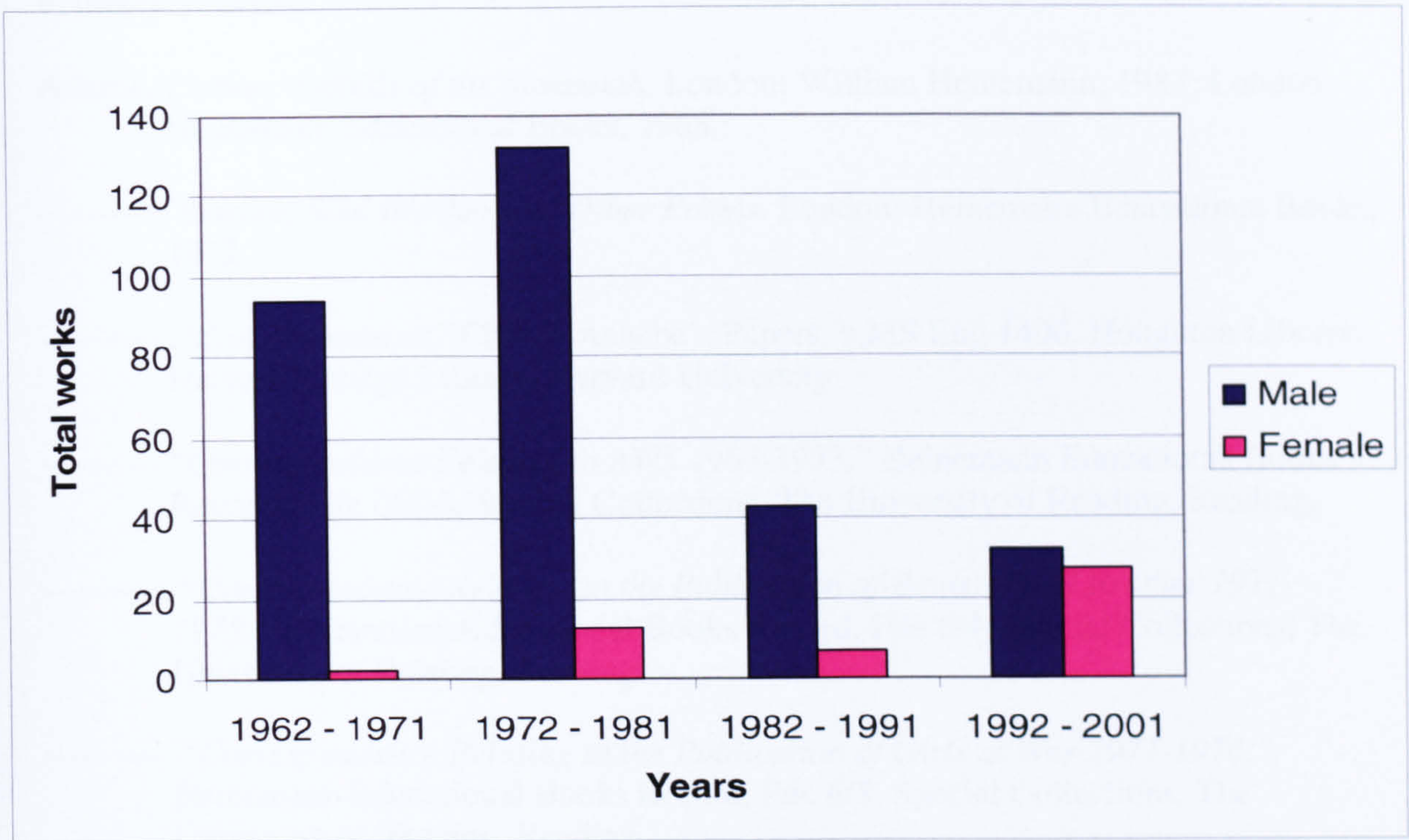


Total works published 1962 - 2003  
(by gender)





Total Works produced (by Gender every decade)



Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Alan Hill, and Chinua Achebe at the relaunch of the African Writers Series in its new (B) format, 1986.  
(Reproduced from Alan Hill's *In Pursuit of Publishing*).





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